

KURT VONNEGUT • MICHAEL MOORE • SUSAN SONTAG

In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS

May 5, 2003

Outside the Box

The war
you're
not seeing

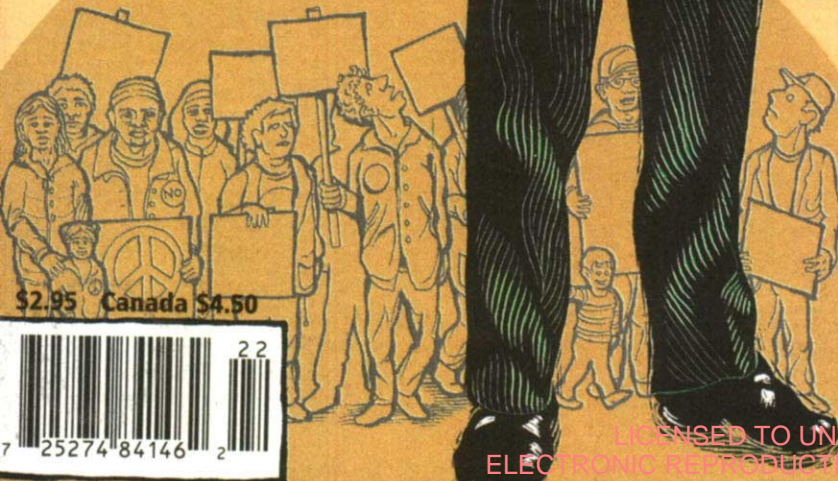


Today, Iraq ... tomorrow, democracy?

Why blacks are against the war

The Clear Channel connection

Yes, it is about oil



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Editorial

Virtual War and Reality

The technology of smart-bomb war transports death and destruction to the virtual realm. With one hand on a joystick and eyes on a video screen, a bomb can be dropped here, a cruise missile targeted there. The vaunted accuracy of these weapons (and they can be accurate) make the splattered guts of what once were human beings (in those too-common instances when a market or hospital is bombed) the fault of a technical glitch, an unfortunate failure in a system that otherwise delivers surgically precise mayhem. Time to reboot and accept that what was lost is no longer there.

This distancing of cause and effect takes advantage of the natural human propensity to disconnect ourselves from the results of our actions, be they exploiting Third World sweatshops by buying cheap consumer goods, contributing to global warming by using inefficient internal combustion engines, or supporting far-off wars as if there were no other options.

Yet that disconnect from the real to the virtual can be a fragile construction. The Vietnam War was graphically brought home to Americans through the pages of weekly magazines and the television news. A napalmed Vietnamese girl running down a road, a young American with his insides spilling out—such images viscerally showed the horror of war. And that is precisely what the Bush administration is trying to protect the American people, and thus themselves, from. Top brass expressed outrage at Al Jazeera for showing images of frightened

American POWs and the corpses of British and American soldiers. They did not want the real effects of the war to intrude on the reality-TV version being broadcast to the public. That they anointed their outrage with the sanctity of the Geneva Conventions, which the United States is grossly violating in Guantanamo, would be laughable were it not so readily believed.

Meanwhile, rumbles of surprising dissent are coming from military officers themselves, who have accused the administration of not sending in enough soldiers. The blame for this has been put on Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his love affair with the idea of waging a high-tech war backed up by a limited number of men. Like a teen video gamer, Rumsfeld traded in his gold coins for the magic sword rather than the faithful warrior. Whoops, bad decision.

Barry M. McCaffrey, a retired Army gen-

eral and former drug czar, took direct aim at Rumsfeld. "I'm a professor of national security studies, and I know a lot more about fighting than he does," McCaffrey said. "The problem isn't that the V Corps serving officers are commenting or that retired senior officers are commenting on televisions. The problem is that they chose to attack 250 miles into Iraq with one armored division and no rear-area security and no second front."

"That we do not have enough troops on the ground is not important in terms of outcome—we will win," wrote Joseph P. Hoar, a retired marine general, on the *New York Times* op-ed page. "However, the concept of risk in a military operation is not solely about winning and losing, it is also about the cost. In this case, the cost will be measured in American lives." He called for Senate hearings when the war is over so that Americans will know "why we didn't send enough troops to begin with."

Gen. Richard B. Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, blasted his dissenting fellow officers, contending that their criticism is "just harmful to our troops." Indeed, morale could suffer should U.S. forces find they are just not being adequately supported.

As for any problems with the war plan, well, they aren't Rumsfeld's fault. "I would be happy

Like a teen video gamer, Rumsfeld traded in his gold coins for the magic sword. Whoops, bad decision.

to take credit for it, but I can't. It was not my plan, it was Gen. Franks' plan," said Rumsfeld. As for Tommy Franks, his relationship with his buck-passing boss is best captured in a passage of Bob Woodward's *Bush at War*, in which the president asks Franks for his opinion and he responds, "Sir, I think exactly what my secretary [Rumsfeld] thinks, what he's ever thought, what he will ever think, or whatever he thought he might think."

The administration would have it easier if everyone were so subservient. Of course, some are. "I heard Rumsfeld, and I think he is absolutely correct," said MSNBC's Eric Sorenson, the man who fired Phil Donahue because his anti-war views were not compatible with MSNBC's patriotic marketing strategy. "We've instructed our generals to be careful not to speculate on what they don't know."

—Joel Bleifuss

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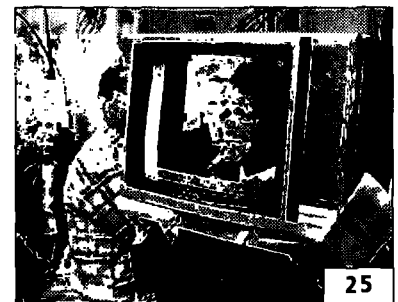
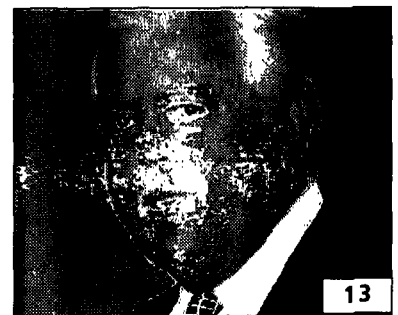
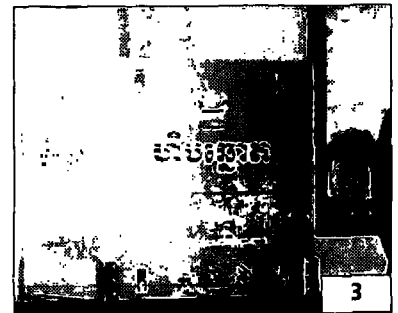
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Left Noise

Israel's military occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is often brutal, cruel and unjust. But Ian Urbina's overly optimistic update on the flagging divestment movement on American campuses highlights why this extremist approach is a misguided tool for resolving the situation ("School Ties," March 31).

Overly simplistic analysis demonizing Israel while romanticizing Palestinians might fit well on a sign, but it falls apart under scrutiny. For example, while all could agree to the illegitimacy of the apartheid regime, it is Israel's occupation policies—not the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state—that must be called into question. Painting such extreme pictures will win few allies in the mainstream communities needed to pressure the U.S. government to play the role required to end the occupation.

If the left actually wants to make a difference, not just a lot of noise, it needs to clearly distinguish between Israel and its occupation policies.

Barry Joseph
Chicago

We CAN Do It

While I very much enjoyed Naureen Shah's coverage of the inaugural national conference of the Campus Anti-War Network ("Campus Coalition," March 31), there is one clarification I feel needs to be made. In keeping with our democratic principles and commitment to grassroots organizing, all of our decision-making was done by majority vote of the delegates present, not "consensus."

Shah is correct, however, in her overall impression of the event. It was indeed an exciting weekend, full of hope and energy, and I was truly humbled to be part of such an extraordinary movement in America. I look forward to building CAN into an even stronger outlet for diverse and democratic campus-based organizing, and I urge all interested students to register their anti-war groups at www.antiwarnetwork.org.

Michael Smith
Campus Anti-War Network
Berkeley, California

2 Out of 2 Doctors Agree

Kip Sullivan states that President Bush is "ever eager to do the bidding of the nation's upper elite" ("Malpractice Myths," March 31). The fact is that the earnings of primary care doctors have remained stagnant in recent years. Can we say the same for tort lawyers and "expert witnesses?"

Another fact is that physicians, insurance companies, executives, tort lawyers, politicians and journalists are all members of "the nation's upper classes," and they all share responsibility for the problem. By blaming only one group, *In These Times* is also doing the bidding of the upper classes, the ones who wear black coats instead of white ones.

Joseph P. Calabro, M.D.
Poughkeepsie, New York

Kip Sullivan hit many points square on the head, although some need expansion and reinforcement. It serves no purpose to divide and conquer when Sullivan headlines that "the real problem isn't greedy lawyers or gullible juries. It's bad doctors."

True enough, on some occasions. But Sullivan barely mentions the conditions and situation behind those glaring causes—the shameful health care system in the United States. Not only are we the world's only developed nation without universal health care, no other country has a malpractice problem of comparable nature. To keep the public off-balance, the insurance

company CEOs pit one of the involved against the other. As patients, lawyers and doctors take pot shots at their moving targets, the insurance cabal laughs all the way to the bank.

All fees paid out to the plaintiffs in the 25 percent of cases defendant physicians lose come from interest on the premium monies stashed in banks and investment bonds. In several states, only the earnings were needed; the principal was never touched. Yet the carriers continually claim hardship and get increments awarded by state insurance committees, and the costs eventually filter down to both doctor and patient, never the HMO or its insurance company parent.

The solution is for the lawyers, doctors, patients and hospitals (now aligned with the carriers) to unite and force a universal single-payer system administered by the feds that puts people before profits and care before the bottom line.

Don Sloan, M.D.
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Terry LaBan



At It Again

Republicans meddle in Cambodian politics

By Bill Myers

PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA—The public leap into Cambodian politics of a group with ties to the Republican Party—a group whose fingerprints are already all over one coup in a foreign country—has raised new alarm at the GOP's distracted yet strong-armed meddling into other nations' affairs.

Observers in Cambodia are worried the International Republican Institute's funding of a new human rights group here, coupled with the Republican takeover of Congress last fall, is a bad omen for U.S.-Cambodia relations. The IRI is a private group with U.S. funding; it sprang from the Reagan era in order to foster "democracy" with different U.S.-funded projects in poor countries around the world.

The issue hit home early last November, when a former Cambodian Senator, Kem Sokha, opened the Cambodian Center for Human Rights on the strength of a \$450,000 grant from the IRI. Sokha is a member of the Royalist party, which has been in coalition with Cambodia's ruling Peoples Party since 1998.

Although the IRI has been in Cambodia for more than a decade, the grant marks the first time it has stepped so openly into Cambodia's seamy politics. The IRI has provided a full-time adviser for the new group while working to get a broadcasting license for it, and has hinted that the grant is merely the beginning.

That's why many in Cambodia are nervous. The day after the new center opened, National Assembly President Prince Norodom Ranariddh blasted the Institute, claiming it was a tool of Cambodia's demagogic opposition leader, Sam Rainsy, and that it was trying to overthrow Cambodia's elected government.

The IRI, which is funded by the U.S. government through a Cold War-era fund calling itself the National Endowment for Democracy, denies the timing of the grant is anything more than coincidence. Officials say they are merely trying to build democracy. "We've all got the same goals. It's something we very much believe in," IRI

spokeswoman Johanna Kao says. "I don't know why the Cambodian government wouldn't want something like this."

That's not enough for many in Cambodia. Even some in the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh, have been alarmed at the GOP's attitude toward this country, which favors Rainsy over elected officials. Kentucky Sen. Mitch McConnell, who now chairs the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee, is a leading figure in this behind-the-scenes squabbling. A sworn foe of Cambodia's actual Prime Minister, Hun Sen, McConnell publicly called for "regime change" in Cambodia twice last year. (The second time, in an open letter to Sam Rainsy, he toned down his words, saying the "regime change" ought to come through the polls; the switch didn't calm any nerves.) Although McConnell is not formally tied to the IRI, he did send Kem Sokha a letter of congratulations on Appropriations Committee stationery—not a very subtle message to send in a country that depends on foreign aid for close to half of its annual budget.

Cambodia's historically corrupt government has been the special obsession of McConnell and the IRI ever since 1997, when thugs tossed a live grenade into a Sam Rainsy Party rally in Phnom Penh. Among the wounded was then IRI Mission Director Ron Abney. The FBI has fingered soldiers loyal to Hun Sen for the attack.

The National Democratic Institute, which is informally tied to the Democrats, has also been in Cambodia for years. For the past few months, in fact, NDI staffers have been gearing up for Cambodia's elections by holding "workshops" for both the Sam Rainsy and royalist parties, where they teach such skills as organizing get-out-the-vote drives and media spin.

But NDI, its staffers say, is careful to offer their "consulting" services to all of Cambodia's parties. "We're guests. We're not trying to undermine the sovereignty of anybody," says NDI Program Manager Dominic Cardy.

The IRI can't say that. On April 12, 2002, Venezuela's popularly elected President Hugo Chavez was almost overthrown in a coup d'etat that killed at least 18. Several in the junta's crowd had ties to the National Endowment for Democracy, the IRI, or both.

The coup was just a few hours old when IRI President George Folsom issued a news release calling the coup the moment



A young Cambodian boy peers in at a ballot box in a voting center in Phnom Penh.

in which "the Venezuelan people rose up to defend democracy" and boasting of the IRI's role "as a bridge between the nation's political parties and all civil society groups" in the coup.

Within hours of that message, the coup had collapsed, Chavez was back in office and Folsom, the IRI and the U.S. government were in ragged humiliation.

The IRI's promises that the Venezuela mess was another time and place have not eased the Cambodian government's nerves. That McConnell's ravings are isolated and all but meaningless in a Washington with its official mind on Iraq is no consolation to most Cambodians; they remember all too well the last time their country was a sideshow to U.S. policy. Back then, it was Kissinger and Nixon fomenting regime change: Cambodians still haven't recovered. ■

CHOR SOKUNTHEA / REUTERS

Welcome to the 21st Century

Ohio state senators oppose the 14th Amendment

By Jamie Pietras

The 14th Amendment was conceived with the noblest intentions. In the post-Civil War era, blacks were to be ensured equal rights under federal law, even in former slave-holding states in the South. It affirmed the concept of "inalienable rights" for all citizens, demanding state laws never infringe upon the Bill of Rights for former slaves. Though some states initially refused to ratify the 1866 amendment, each would eventually adopt it. Each, that is, save one.

That's right: While blacks can certainly vote, own property, and purchase handguns in the state of Ohio, the 14th Amendment has somehow managed to evade the state's books for 135 years. When the measure was first introduced,

Ohio adopted it, only to rescind it a year later. According to an 1868 state resolution, the federal protection was "contrary to the best interests of the white race."

Suffice it to say, when Cincinnati-area state Sen. Mark Mallory introduced a bill this year to correct the long-standing oversight, he didn't expect any major battles. "We can't let the last message on the 14th Amendment in Ohio be one of racism," he explained. The gesture, Mallory said, would be "symbolic but extremely important."

Granted, race relations isn't one of Ohio's marks of pride. Cincinnati, the city which partially comprises Mallory's district, was in April 2001 the site of the ugliest riot since the Rodney King verdict. The city erupted when police shot and killed Timothy Thomas, an unarmed black 19-year-old. Celebrities from Bill Cosby to Barbara Ehrenreich to Spike Lee have since refused engagements there as part of an economic boycott.

In addition, while African-Americans make up only 11.5 percent of Ohio's population, they account for half its inmates in prison and on Death Row. Hamilton County alone has 45 people currently fac-

ing execution. It's no coincidence Ohio ranked fourth in the Southern Poverty Law Center's last analysis of hate group activity, with groups like the World Church of the Creator and Ku Klux Klan actively recruiting there.

The legislation was actually the idea of the University of Cincinnati Law School's Urban Justice Institute, a progressive advocacy group created after the Cincinnati riots. Speaking to the group last year about the proposal's chances of being approved, Mallory said, "It would be a slam dunk, unless the conservatives in the House give us trouble."

He was only joking—but they really did.

Rep. Tom Brinkman, a Cincinnati Republican, voted against the bill. Timothy Grendell, a Republican from Cleveland, said he didn't want his vote in favor of the amendment to be "misconstrued." Why? Abortion.

The 14th Amendment, Grendell says, was misapplied in *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court case that established a woman's right to abortion. Grendell said he received e-mails from conservatives worrying lawmakers would send the wrong message in approving the amendment, knowing it has been used to support pro-choice causes.

The issue blew into a firestorm after the March 13 *Cleveland Plain Dealer* hit newsstands. "Grendell said Mallory should read the case *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, but he doubted Mallory would understand it," the paper reported. Accusing the senator of not reading a memo Grendell had sent to Republicans a week earlier, in which Grendell said he would support the 14th Amendment, Grendell added: "He's the only reason I might support the Ohio Reads program," the state's volunteer tutoring program.

Grendell says his comments were taken out of context. On a March 16 episode of the *Capitol Square* TV program, he said his conversation with the *Plain Dealer* went like this: "Either [Mallory] didn't read my memorandum, or [he] has a problem with reading, which led me to probably want to support the Ohio Reads program."

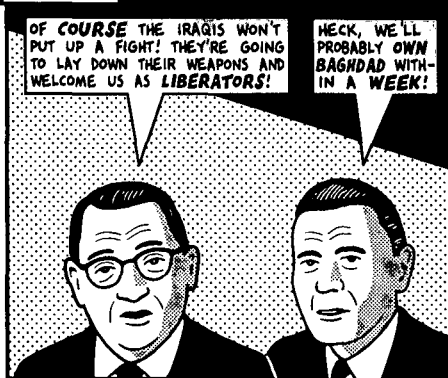
In response, Mallory said Grendell was "leading the effort to make Ohio a national embarrassment."

Despite the controversy, Mallory's bill passed unanimously in the Senate, and Brinkman was the lone holdout in the House. Ohio is soon expected to recognize the revised Bill of Rights. It's about time. ■

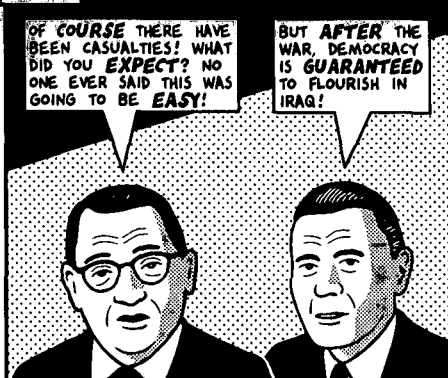
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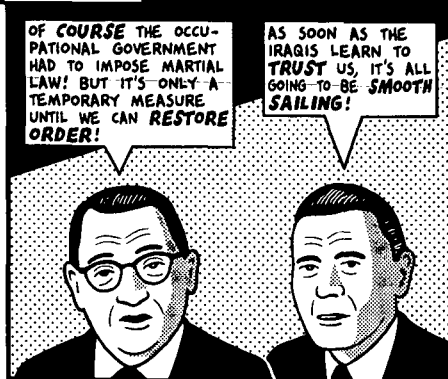
THE PRELUDE



THE WAR



THE AFTERMATH



THE PRELUDE



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Dissent from Within

Anti-Castro petition gathers steam

By Patrick Michael Rucker

HAVANA—Maybe more than comedians, dictators rely on timing. Holding power is more than a series of purges, rallies and rigged elections. One has to know when to play the tyrant and when to play the savior. Fidel Castro, the world's longest ruling dictator, proved he still has the knack last month when he timed a crack-down on internal dissent to coincide with the beginning of war in Iraq.

Hours before the first American cruise missiles hit Baghdad, Cuban security forces began rounding up independent journalists, democracy activists and other dissidents. In five days, 76 people had been arrested, according to the independent Cuban Commission on Human Rights and Reconciliation. None were immediately charged with a crime, though Cuban officials expressed their intention to try those it has labeled "counterrevolutionaries" and "traitors."

To many observers, the latest shake-down shows that Castro had lost his patience—both with his increasingly outspoken domestic critics and with James Cason, chief of the U.S. diplomatic mission in Havana, who has offered free Internet access, office space and encouragement to dissidents taking on Castro's one-party Communist rule.

But while Castro had some of his strongest foes collared and threatened to have Cason expelled, Oswaldo Paya, his most celebrated internal critic, was notably ignored. That omission, more than the crackdown itself, might foreshadow the future of Cuba's dissident movement.

Paya is the author of the Varela Project, a constitutionally permitted petition demanding greater human rights, amnesty for nonviolent political prisoners, free enterprise and electoral reform. Last May, Paya presented more than 11,000 signatures to Cuba's National Assembly and demanded a public referendum on its principles.

Under the Cuban Constitution, the National Assembly should have responded to the petition last fall. Instead, the Castro regime has tried to ignore the Varela Project—named after a 19th century Cuban independence advocate—and discredit Paya, even as his international stature continues to grow. "You know what the secret



Cuban dissident Oswaldo Paya.

is to this regime?" Paya rhetorically asks from his home in Havana. "Fear. But the Varela Project lets people say, 'We are not afraid. Here you have my name and address, and I want change.' For the first time, the people are mobilizing, and the government is growing fearful."

The most recent recipient of the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Expression, the European Union's top human rights prize, Paya is former Czech President Vaclav Havel's choice for this year's Nobel Peace Prize. Earlier this year Paya met Havel, the Pope, Secretary of State Colin Powell and other world leaders on a worldwide tour to promote the Varela Project. No Cuban dissident has ever garnered such renown. Yet from the start, he has been Castro's most unlikely rival. The voice of Cuban political opposition has typically come from Miami's hard-line, exile Cuban community, and in the opinion of that constituency, the Varela Project was doomed.

Conventional wisdom had it that Paya could never organize the grassroots network the Varela Project required. Yes, the

Cuban Constitution ostensibly permitted such a petition, but it seemed like a ploy—a tempting lever of democracy deep within Castro's totalitarian apparatus that no one would be foolish enough to grasp.

And the project itself was rather too conciliatory for Miami Cubans' liking. They wanted to confront the Castro regime head-on, while the Varela Project sought reform. Even if Paya got his signatures, Miami Cubans were not likely to support it.

But if Miami Cubans were skeptical, Paya's fellow dissidents were inspired. Unlike every dissident effort before it, the Varela Project challenges the Castro regime on its own terms. It does not come as a vendetta, but as a very patient question: When are we going to get our freedom?

Not surprisingly, Castro has tried to change the subject. Last spring, he organized a national referendum on Cuba's communist system. After days of government-sponsored marches and rallies, 99 percent of Cuban voters endorsed the proposal making the island's communist system "irrevocable."

It was a cynical mockery of the Varela Project that at any other time would have left Castro well satisfied. But, as he knows better than anyone, 8 million extorted votes for communism do not amount to one freely given signature for democracy. Next to the Varela Project, Castro's theatrics seem strained and unconvincing.

In another era, back when the Soviet Union was the only power that mattered to Castro, Paya would have been dealt with summarily. Even today, if Paya was a shrill extremist of the Miami variety, he could be easily discredited. But that era is gone, and the Varela Project is implicitly reasonable.

All of that leads us to the events in Cuba last month. Castro ordered a crack-down to prove he still could. But while half of those arrested were Varela Project activists, the group's leader was spared. One can only conclude that, for Castro, arresting Paya would be more trouble than it is worth, bringing the kind of international condemnation his broken regime would just as soon avoid. In short, Oswaldo Paya has the world's attention, and Fidel Castro is rattled. ■

Patrick Michael Rucker, author of *This Troubled Land*, recently served as the Financial Times correspondent in Havana.

JORGE REY / GETTY

Jumbo Problem

Shrimp aquaculture threatens Guatemala's tropical coasts

By Erin Henk

CHAMPERICO, GUATEMALA—Once one of the busiest ports in Guatemala, the streets of this small town are now desolate and eerily quiet, the silence broken only by fishermen who follow the path through town to the dry shores of the Ixtán estuary. On the downslope from the foreboding metal fence of the Camarones del Sur shrimp farm, known as Camarsa, a few fisherman stand half-submerged in the shallow waters. They cast out their nets, only to have them return empty.

"Before Camarsa came here, this town was wealthy and this estuary was full," says Ober Orienzo, a resident and native of Cham-

perico, as he points out the former waterline of the Ixtán estuary. It stands 20 feet above where the water now greets the shore.

Along with other nearby shrimp farms, Camarsa has changed the fishing industry in the Pacific coastal region of Guatemala beyond recognition. Before the company arrived 12 years ago, fishermen used to average a 15-pound daily catch. In the chemical-laden waters of the Ixtán estuary, the fishermen are now fortunate if they catch 2 or 3 pounds per day. Champerico's other estuary, the Chapán, has a waterline so low and water so brown that no fishermen bother to venture there.

Not long ago considered a delicacy, shrimp is now commonplace on U.S. and European dinner plates. Three million tons of shrimp were consumed in 2000, and Greenpeace says the number will rise to 4 million by 2010. With U.S. producers supplying just 12 percent of the shrimp consumed here, outside producers must provide the rest. Shrimp farms that supply

the United States, Europe and Japan (countries with the highest consumption) are located in Latin America, Southeast and East Asia, and South Asia.

Shrimp farms do not ascribe to the principle of sustainable development. "Bottom trawling" has traditionally been employed to catch shrimp, but with demand multiplying, the technique is rapidly being replaced by farms. Large ponds are dug along coastlines, and any mangrove forests or wetlands in the way are destroyed. The ponds are then filled with water from nearby estuaries. Four months later, the ponds are drained and water is released back into the estuary, along with the hazardous chemicals and toxins used in processing.

After only five or 10 years of operation, most shrimp farms fall victim to their own waste. Wastewater from farming operations is constantly flushed back into local waterways, and in draining the estuaries, the shrimp farms also leach the nearby terrain of its natural nutrients. The sites

Gott Mit Uns [67]

"Pray that the president and his advisers will seek God and his wisdom daily and not rely on their own understanding," soldiers are urged by a fundy pamphlet distributed to Marines in Iraq.

Meanwhile, the brave men and women of the Southern Baptist Convention, along with an organization called Samaritan's Purse, run by George W. Bush's prayer buddy the Rev. Franklin Graham, have announced their willingness to cater to the humanitarian needs of the swart infidel, just as soon as he's pacified. Leaders of each of these groups have made no secret of their hatred of Islam, "an evil and wicked religion," in Graham's words. Still, as Christians, their hearts are full of love.

How will American Jesus freaks help the effort to win hearts and minds in postwar Iraq? "We believe in sharing [Christ] in deed and in word," an executive of Samaritan's Purse

told the *Newhouse News Service*. "We'll be who we are." A spokesman for the Catholics, whose intelligence about Iraqis seems on a par with Rummy and Wolfy's, had this to add: "Conversations about spiritual things will come about as people ask about our faith."

We Hector, You Decide [41]

Anti-war protesters who marched by the New York offices of *Fox News* on March 27 were hailed by curious expressions of the network's vaunted objectivity. Streaming across its electronic ticker were taunts such as "Who won your right to show up here today? Protesters or soldiers?" More tellingly: "How do you keep a war protester in suspense? Ignore them."

Meanwhile, Clear Channel Communications, another oracle of the common man, was organizing pro-war rallies in stadiums

across the heartland, attracting as many as 20,000 to a single event. Technically, the "Clear Channelers' *Daily for America*" campaign has raised eyebrows of former regulators. "I think this is pretty extraordinary," the *Chicago Tribune* quotes former FCC Commissioner Glen Robinson. "It sounds like borderline manufacturing of the news."

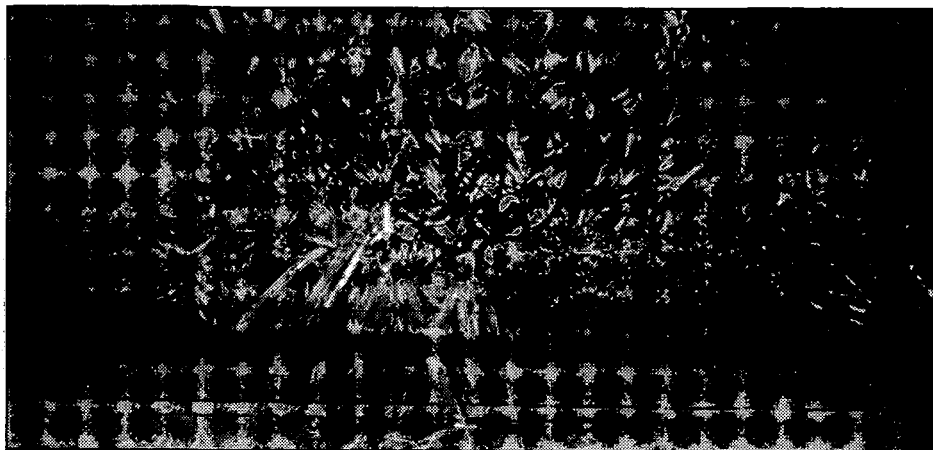
You Were Warned [32]

Stunned by unexpected ambushes by Iraqi irregulars, U.S. military honchos have maintained that these were not the sort of combatants they "war-gamed" against. Not so, reports the *Guardian*. In war game exercises last year, retired

Marine Gen. Paul Van Riper assessed the role of a blood-thirsty, Middle Eastern strong-arm leader in his defense strategy of guerrilla warfare, suicide bombings, and the like. The result? Saddam Van Riper handed U.S. forces their asses. The ex-Marine's battle plan was so effective that Pentagon brass stopped the games and insisted that he "play by the rules." Nothing doing, said Van Riper, and he quit the games in protest.



TERRY LABAN



are usually abandoned, leaving the land infertile and the water polluted.

Worse, mangrove destruction has a profound ecological impact. Mangroves buffer mainland areas from the strong storms that routinely hit tropical coasts and are natural protection areas for sea life and birds. More than half the world's mangroves have already been destroyed as a result of shrimp farming, and many local communities have been moved to make way for shrimp farms.

The World Bank and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have also played a role in the growth of the shrimp farm industry. In the wake of 1998's Hurricane Mitch, the World Bank invested a great deal in the shrimp industry, claiming that with more funds to stimulate employment, the industry would be able to alleviate the poverty plaguing Guatemala and the rest of Central America.

But this investment has proved costly for small-scale producers and to the local environment. Shrimp farming "is a huge multi-billion-dollar business," says Jacob Scherr, head of International Programs at the Natural Resources Defense Council. "What you see, in a sense, is some of the poorest people in the world competing for the use of coastal resources with some of the richest consumers on the planet."

Many Latin American NGOs have banded together to form the Latin American Mangrove Network for the Defense of Coastal Ecosystems and Community Life, through which they are strategizing to assist those affected by the destruction of coastal estuaries. The Mangrove Action Project, the Environmental Defense Fund, World Wildlife Fund International and other ecological organizations have also formed the Industrial Shrimp Action Network, which

aims to combat the social and ecological impact of shrimp farming.

But the real problem may be that existing protection laws are not being enforced. In Honduras, 60,000 to 70,000 acres of wetlands have been declared a protected RAMSAR site and are also protected by national law. Yet USAID, supported by the World Bank, has loaned money to the company Granjas Marinas San Bernardo to help it farm in the protected area.

Since there are usually few environmentalists already in shrimping areas, it is local producers themselves who have to take matters into their own hands and say no to the farms. In 2001, members of the Champerico community demonstrated their opposition to Camarsa, saying the water was contaminated and that the company's fences prevented them from obtaining access to fishing grounds. Two young men were killed in separate protests within the space of a month and a half. Since the deaths, the company has acted, moving its fences 40 meters from the waterline. Though this yielded more fishing access for many, there are still fewer and fewer fish to be caught.

Giovanni Perez, another fisherman, stands submerged in the Ixtán water, casting out his net. "Most of the time, we don't have anything to take home to our families," he says. "Many people now have to move ... or [go to] the United States to find work. They don't want to. Their families are here and most have spent their entire lives in Champerico."

Ober watches the calm, low waters of the Ixtán. "There is nothing here for my friends to find in this water. Now there are no fish, no shrimp and no crabs. It is due to this they cannot eat, and it is due to this they cannot live." ■

No Relief

Lackluster cold warriors
bungle Latin American policy

By Martin Austermuhle

Over the past two years, President Bush has done anything and everything in his power to keep Otto Reich in a position of authority regarding policy toward Latin America—so much so that the proverbial game of musical chairs has landed Reich positions as assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, "special envoy" to Colin Powell for Latin American affairs, and now "special envoy" for Western Hemisphere initiatives. While his vaguely defined new position is little more than a concession to the right, it is a telling promotion for a man so closely tied to illegal covert operations in Latin America.

Since Reich failed to receive a confirmation hearing in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—under either Democratic or Republican control—Bush instead decided to put forth Roger Noriega's name early this year for the State Department's highest position dealing with Latin America. Noriega is a former aid to Sen. Jesse Helms (during his reign over the Foreign Relations Committee) and current ambassador to the Organization of American States, a position he will hold until his nomination is confirmed by the Senate, and he looks like a plum choice compared to the scandal-ridden Reich. But in Washington, it's not that looks can be deceiving, it's that they are.

Noriega's appointment to replace Reich as assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs may have garnered less vocal opposition than Otto Reich's did two years ago, but that's no reason to think policy toward the region will take a turn for the better. At best, we can hope Latin America actually shows up on the foreign policy radar. At worst, the Bush administration will keep stumbling around in the dark hoping to find the radar altogether.

While a marginal improvement upon his predecessor, Noriega's nomination was described by Sebastian Edwards, former chief economist for Latin America at the World Bank, as "a political move aimed at

pleasing the anti-Castro Cuban community in South Florida." The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* mused that maybe, just maybe, "With the Florida elections over and the next presidential election nearly two years off, the administration can now think more in terms of American interests, and less in terms of electoral advantage." Not so, thinks Larry Birns, director of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs. Calling Noriega "a Cold Warrior looking for a cause," Birns went so far as to claim that "in both style and content [Noriega] comes alarmingly close to being a warmed-over Reich, but with less exposure, skills and heft, and an equal predilection for invention and anti-



STEVE DESICH / KRT

Roger Noriega, U.S. ambassador to the Organization of the American States.

Castro zealotry." This spells trouble for a region marred by economic slowdowns and punctuated by political conflicts, an area feeling the strains of the Democratic and free-market honeymoon coming to an end.

What can be said about the future of U.S. policy toward Latin America when it is entrusted to the likes of Reich, Noriega and Rogelio Pardo-Maurer, deputy defense secretary for Western Hemisphere affairs? Nothing good. During his tenure as head of the Office of Public Diplomacy during the Reagan era, Reich played the role of Nicaragua Contra cheerleader, during which he committed acts considered by the U.S. Comptroller-General to be "pro-

IN PERSON

BY J.D. LLOYD

Imprisoned by the Patriot Act

While a few of those detained under the provisions of the October 2001 USA Patriot Act have been naturalized U.S. citizens, most have been immigrants with green cards or here on work or student visas. One such faceless person is Kuwaitite national Hasan Hasan.

After emigrating to the United States in 1996 to study English at California State University in Long Beach, California, Hasan immersed himself in campus, civic and left-leaning political affairs. At the same time, Hasan also completed a Master's degree in mathematics and began to teach the subject as an adjunct instructor.

Did you experience any anti-Muslim sentiment after the attacks of September 11, 2001?

Actually, I found many people were nicer to me than usual, because they thought I was going through a difficult time. I didn't fear as much as many people from the Middle East and from Asia who limited their movements and stayed in their houses most of the time. I didn't think I would be hurt. I felt very positive, and I thought that the

law enforcement agencies were for me. I didn't think that one day they would be used to oppress many American citizens, or American residents, or immigrants who are from foreign regions.

You were arrested and detained for two periods, for over three months combined. What happened when you were arrested the first time, in April 2002?

I was in my classroom at Cerritos College teaching mathematics. The dean entered my classroom and asked me to see him after class. When I went to the dean's office, he seemed very uncomfortable. He was mumbling a lot—very apologetic. He said, "I don't know how to put it for you. I am just a messenger." He told me I was one of the best instructors he had, that I had done all the paperwork he asked and he had received no complaints whatsoever about me. Then he said, "I am very sorry, but I need you to turn over the keys right now and leave." I asked him at least to give me a reason, but he said, "No reason was given; I am just following orders." I told him it was a critical

time for the students because they had an exam the day after next. I asked that he at least wait two days, but he said, "Sorry, I can't."

I turned my keys over to him, shook his hand and left. Outside the door of the dean's office, two cops from Cerritos College were waiting for me. They escorted me to the exit of the division building, where two more cops from the Long Beach Police Department were standing. One of the Long Beach cops told me, "Put your hands behind your ass and spread your legs." Then they handcuffed me and led me to the parking lot.

The police never read you your Miranda rights?

No, not at all. [An INS agent] told me I was under arrest. When I told her that I had a work visa valid until December 2002, she said that I was violating my work visa because I was not working. "I just came out of my classroom," I said. The agent told me, "You were working till an hour ago, but now you are not."

They kept me for a day in the Long Beach jail, and the next day I was transferred to the L.A. County

Jail. After spending a day there, I was taken to the Mira Loma Detention Center in Lancaster. So, one day I was teaching mathematics at Cerritos College, and the next thing I knew I was in INS custody in Lancaster.

You met other detainees at Mira Loma who had a more difficult time than you.

Yes. One such prisoner was Gary LeMaitre, an Arab-Armenian and Canadian. He is about 50 years old. He is a lawyer. He has lived in the U.S. for the last 15 years. He is married to an American woman, and he has three American daughters. He went to the INS, accompanied by his wife, to receive his green card. The employee asked him to step outside for five minutes. While waiting outside the office, four cops appeared and arrested him. When he protested, they insulted him in front of his wife. He had been at Mira Loma for almost eight months when I met him. He was there without any charge and without a court date.

What was it like there?

hibited, covert propaganda activities ... beyond the range of acceptable agency public information activities." Both Noriega and Reich influenced the creation of the Helms-Burton law in 1996, which tightened the 40-year-old embargo on Cuba. Pardo-Maurer served as a spokesperson for the Contras in Washington during the '80s and has most recently been accused of giving the go-ahead to opponents of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez during that country's coup attempt in April 2002, which the Bush administration quickly endorsed. These are not the reputations upon which great leaders are created, must less logical policies.

In the meantime, Mexico is begging for a comprehensive agreement on immigration. Bolivia—one of the IMF's cherished "early reformers"—recently saw La Paz go up in flames after police and firefighters joined protests against government plans for a tax hike. Venezuela remains stuck between a rock (Chavez) and a hard place (the opposition). Brazil—the world's eighth largest economy—successfully elected a president who has doubts about Washington's plans for the hemisphere, most notably the Free Trade Area of the Americas, set to begin in 2005. Colombia can't seem to escape the double bind of guerilla insurgency and cocaine produc-

tion. In January, Peter Hakim of the Inter-American Dialogue noted that "if relations with Latin America are more difficult, it's because things are going so badly in the region, and the U.S. response has been at best sporadic and unimaginative." It's doubtful that Noriega will bring any new insights to policymaking.

President Bush stated on January 16, 2002, "We're committed to building a prosperous, free, and democratic hemisphere. Nothing will distract us, nothing will deter us, in completing this great work." Realistically, something will, and something has: Reich, Noriega and Pardo-Maurer. ■

IN PERSON

When I first arrived at the check-in desk, there was an Armenian gentleman sitting next to me. The handcuffs were hurting him unbearably. An officer asked me to act as a translator between him and the Armenian. He clearly didn't know the difference between an Armenian and an Arab, and that we speak different languages.

What happened the second time you were arrested?

When the Long Beach police and the FBI came to arrest me on June 6, they questioned me especially about three paintings. One of them had tall buildings and lightning from the sky, and they asked me, "Is this New York, and does lightning mean attack from the air?" I said that this is a new interpretation I never thought of, even though I made this painting four or five years ago.

Then they went to another painting which had an island with in a lake or a river, and some buildings across from the canal, and they told me, "This seems kind of like Ellis Island. But we don't see the Statue of Liberty. Are you planning to blow up the Statue of Liberty? Is this a kind of future projection?"

There was a third painting of a power plant. They asked me, "Is it

the one in San Pedro?" And I said, "Actually, it is the one down in Long Beach on Pacific Coast Highway. It was part of a project in which you go outside and choose any building and you draw it."

I had many other paintings, nudes, modern, and so on, but they didn't pay attention to those.

They came from my roommate. He was an immigrant also, and I was letting him live with me as a favor to a friend. About a month after my first arrest, I evicted him. He was beating his girlfriend and causing problems with the neighbors, so I changed the locks and moved his possessions out

their campaigns to include all categories or slices of the society, regardless of color or origin. Maybe they will start with foreigners on visa from certain countries. Then maybe they will expand to the people who have green cards from certain countries. Then maybe they will move to American citizens who are originally from countries put on the blacklist after 9/11. Then later on maybe they will include any American, white or black or Latino, who has been seen hanging around with Middle Easterners, or who has just spoken to someone who is Middle Eastern or Asian. So I think the campaign will expand, will include everyone in the future. The people who feel they are safe—it will come to them.

In the long run, you protect yourself by getting involved. But if you say to yourself, "I don't like politics, I don't like to get involved, I want my quiet life—home to work, work to home," you will find nobody there to stand for you when the police or authorities arrest you. ■

J.D. Lloyd is a freelance writer in Venice, California. Hasan Hasan now awaits an INS deportation hearing that will determine his eligibility to remain in the United States.

The INS said I was violating my work visa. 'You were working till an hour ago, but now you are not.'

Many of my friends, when I came out of jail, were joking with me. They said, "Hasan, from now on, just hang nudes and modern paintings only. So you won't have this problem again."

When you went to hearings and your attorneys made discovery motions—for example, to find out why you were being detained and what the basis of your charge was—the government initially would not disclose that information. Eventually you learned, through your attorney, that you'd been charged with making terrorist threats. What was the basis of those threats?

onto the sidewalk. When he found his things outside, he called the police. He told them that I had threatened his life and that I was a terrorist—a member of the Fatah group from Kuwait. He was making up stories because he was angry. I never threatened him; I gave him a place to live for seven months. And the Fatah is actually part of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Although the average American citizen may have treated you well, the authorities have not. How do you feel about that?

I fear that these authorities will not hesitate in the future to expand

Remember Rachel Corrie

By Geov Parrish

Rachel Corrie, a 23-year-old senior at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, was killed by Israeli soldiers in the Rafah Refugee Camp in the Gaza Strip on March 16.

Corrie was run over—and run over again, when an army bulldozer backed up over her a second time—as she tried to prevent soldiers from demolishing a Palestinian home in the camp. She was in Palestine as a volunteer with the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), the most prominent of several nonviolent groups that in the last year have been bringing international activists—primarily Americans and Europeans—to work as peacekeepers: witnessing Israeli treatment of Palestinians, trying to provide assistance to Palestinian civilians, and afterward bringing the stories of what they see back home to their own countries.

The circumstances of her death were disputed by the Israeli military and government, which claim that the bulldozer's driver was unaware of Corrie. This is flatly denied by other ISM volunteers who witnessed Corrie's death; in their version, Corrie talked with the driver only a few minutes before the incident and was wearing a bright, fluorescent orange jacket.

The Israel-Palestine conflict has largely disappeared from American news reports, but that's not because the violence has ended. Quite the opposite: It has become routine, with daily violence and humiliation inflicted upon many Palestinians, deaths (often children) almost every day, and periodic cycles of suicide bombings—all, at least rhetorically, inflicted by each side either to retaliate against the other side or "prevent" future violence.

It hasn't; the level of economic deprivation, house and crop demolitions, shoot-to-kill curfews, restrictions on employment and movement, random arrests, beatings, torture, and worse inflicted by the Israelis have all essentially become background noise for most Americans. A few, however, have been intentionally putting themselves in harm's way.

The logic behind programs like ISM, which was launched by the Palestinian Center for Approachment in late 2001, is



Moments before her death, American peace activist Rachel Corrie, 23, tries to stop an Israeli bulldozer in the Gaza Strip.

similar to that of "human shield" programs in the past. As in many conflicts where the protagonists are averse to publicity—especially in America—Israelis have often hesitated in inflicting their usual levels of violence when there are Western witnesses. Israel itself has tacitly acknowledged the effectiveness of such programs; in recent months, the IDF has begun arresting the volunteers, and both deportations and denial of entry into Israel (the only way to get into Palestine) have also increased.

Corrie's death was the first among the international volunteers. However, ISM volunteers and other advocates for Palestinians argue that such volunteers have likely saved countless others, either by defusing confrontations or, by their mere presence, dissuading Israeli soldiers or "settler" vigilantes from attacks on individuals or families.

Repeatedly, over the last year, returning American volunteers have reported the same thing: Ordinary Palestinians and their families both thank the internation-

als for caring enough to come, and beg them to tell their countrymen—that's us—what is being done in our name and with our tax money. The munitions scattered like confetti around Palestinian streets all have "made in USA" on them; likely, the bulldozer that killed Corrie was manufactured in her home country.

Had Corrie been killed by Saddam Hussein's soldiers, of course, she'd be an instant national hero, and America would be enraged. Instead, with the war in Iraq now underway, it's likely that the death of Rachel Corrie will be soon forgotten by most. But there are now hundreds of other Americans serving as nonviolent peacekeepers and witnesses in both Palestine and Iraq. It's worth taking a moment to remember not only Rachel, but all of these brave activists. They're putting their lives on the line for their beliefs, for the love of humanity, and because they feel a need to take responsibility for the actions of our elected government. We should all be so committed. ■

The People vs. Richard Perle

By Ben Winters

March should have been a triumphant month for Richard Perle. The former American Enterprise Institute fellow and assistant secretary of defense has been calling for regime change longer and louder than anyone. But on March 27, as the media dug ever deeper into his encyclopedic catalog of conflicts of interest, Perle abruptly left his post as chairman of the Defense Policy Board (he will still serve as a director on the board). Reaching Perle on the phone to discuss his resignation, the *New York Times* found the iconic neoconservative in kind of a cranky mood: "Let me just tell you something," Perle said to the reporter, refusing to confirm his departure before angrily hanging up. "If I had [resigned], you'd be the last person in the world I'd want to talk to."

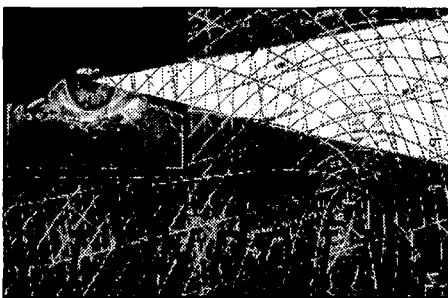
But surely Perle's real enemy that day was veteran investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, whose March 17 *New Yorker* article kicked off the round robin of press disclosures and proposed Congressional investigations that culminated in Perle's resignation. These discoveries included his work as a lobbyist for financially and ethically bankrupt telecom giant Global Crossing, trying to arrange its sale to a company previously heckled by conservatives as a tool of the Chinese government.

Hersh's original piece was relatively tame, as scandalous exposés go. Never explicitly accusing him of breaking the government's ethics code, Hersh explains that Perle had lunch in January with the Saudi businessmen Adnan Khashoggi and Harb Zuhair. The purpose of the lunch, according to Hersh's sources, was "to pave the way for Zuhair to put together a group" of Saudi investors for Tirreme Partners, where Perle is a managing partner, and which invests in homeland security and defense companies.

Perle's reaction was to threaten to sue Hersh and *The New Yorker* for libel—but not here. "I intend to launch legal action in the United Kingdom," Perle told the *New York Sun*. "I'm talking to Queen's Counsel right now."

The New Yorker is based, as is well known, in the city of New York. Perle's threat raises the bizarre prospect of a prominent American figure threatening to bring suit against a prominent American journalist writing for a prominent American magazine—in England, because the United Kingdom lacks our First Amendment protections of the press.

Hersh isn't too worried. "Look, he hasn't sued me yet, and I'm not sure that he



will sue me," Hersh told *In These Times* just as Perle's resignation was announced. "But he has every right to. He has every right to call me names." After the *New Yorker* story broke, Perle called Hersh "the closest thing American journalism has to a terrorist."

Perle made no secret of his reason for wanting to take his prospective case across the pond. Not only do the British have no First Amendment, they've got no *Sullivan vs. The New York Times*, the landmark Supreme Court decision that granted the American press "breathing room" when dealing with public figures.

If Perle's suit does materialize, it would be a classic example of what lawyers call forum shopping; knowing full well he'll never win in America, Perle hopes to take his case somewhere where he might. London is a favorite destination for forum shoppers. The media baron Robert Maxwell once sued *The New Republic* there, though that magazine, like *The New Yorker*, sells only a tiny fraction of their copies in Britain.

Meanwhile, the Internet has created a brave new world for forum shoppers. In one prominent example from 2001, Al Giordano and his Web site *Narco News* were sued in New York by the bank of

Mexico—which had already lost the same case in that country—because the site was "affiliated with" a New York-based Web site.

A whole raft of legal questions have yet to be answered. If I write something nasty about you in a Nashville newspaper, and someone reads it on a Web site in Turkey, can you sue me for libel in Ankara?

The High Court of Australia essentially said yes last December, when it allowed a businessman to pursue his case against Dow Jones in that country, even though the offending *Barron's* article was published in the United States and could only be accessed in Australia via the Internet. That's bad news for Dow Jones, and very bad news for publishers in general, if it means a world where journalists face suit in every country where their work can be downloaded.

One silver lining is that American courts have tended to refuse enforcement of libel findings in overseas courts, especially when they feel the case never could have been won under our laws. But that's little comfort to companies with extensive overseas assets, like Dow Jones and Condé Nast, which owns *The New Yorker*. Besides, as Jim Naureckas of the media

Rich, powerful and frustrated by the First Amendment? Just go forum shopping.

watchdog group FAIR points out, it's not losing libel suits that has the chilling effect, it's having to face them at all. "Media outlets in this country are overwhelmingly for-profit enterprises," he explains. "They're in business to make money, and not only is losing a libel suit expensive, but winning one is expensive."

Hersh says he's "not too rattled" by Perle's threats. "If you want to know what my real reaction was, I was very angry at myself, because I immediately knew that I had hit something big," Hersh muses. "I mean, he's calling me a terrorist. Perle is a tough guy, he can take a little of this sort of thing. I thought to myself, whatever you did, you didn't get it all. You missed it." ■

The Un-American Media

By Ana Marie Cox

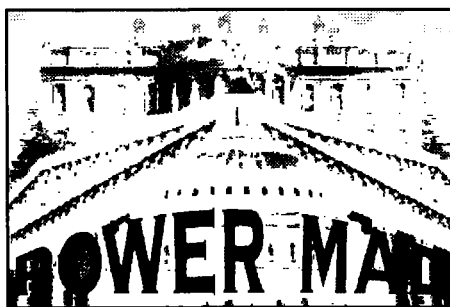
There was a time you could safely assume that anyone calling skeptical coverage of the war in Iraq “un-American” was probably also speed-dialing Rush Limbaugh. Now it seems that calling skeptical coverage of the war “un-American” is probably correct, if only in the most literal sense. With the American press largely distracted or enraptured with the spectacle of combat, the duty of examining the motives behind the war has fallen to the world’s other media outlets.

The audience for these un-American stories is becoming more and more American. In the past month, foreign news Web sites have seen large volumes of traffic from computers in the United States. *Wired* reported that almost half of the visitors to the *Guardian* Web site were Americans. Americans have also been flocking to Arab news sources, particularly the Qatar-based news channel Al Jazeera. The channel reaches 150,000 households in the United States via satellite, but their Web site reaches anyone with a modem. During the first week of the war, “Al Jazeera” rounded out the top three terms searched for on Google.com (along with “CNN” and “Iraq.”).

This trend has been building steadily since the New Year, but the war has brought it to new heights. A media metric called “Blogdex,” developed by MIT’s Media Lab, ranks Web sites by the number of independent—and mostly American—Web diarists, or “bloggers,” linking to them. It’s a fairly reliable indication of what people on the Internet are reading. Since the war began, almost every other site has been a foreign news source.

What kind of stories have the bloggers pointed to? The *Financial Times* reporting on the invasion of Umm Qsar, “a small but politically significant battle that has become an embarrassment for the invasion force.” And the BBC reporting on a British jet downed by a “friendly fire” Patriot missile. One doesn’t have to rely on professional news sources to hear about Iraq, either: “Salam Pax” (http://dear_raed.blogspot.com/) blogs from Baghdad itself.

It’s heartening to find that Americans in large numbers thirst for alternatives to the narrow spectrum presented by our native news outlets. It’s even more heartening to discover that these alternatives exist. Want to read an A-section article about who supplied Iraq with its arsenal of weapons? Canada’s *Globe and Mail* will have your answer (the United States, of course). What about an investigation that builds upon Seymour Hersh’s reporting on



the individuals likely to make a profit off the war? The *Guardian* linked Bush hawk Richard Perle to a software company selling terror alert software.

The relative tenacity of the foreign press was clear, of course, before the war began. The *Globe and Mail* broke the story regarding the falsified documents used in Colin Powell’s U.N. testimony on the Iraqi regime’s alleged bid to purchase nuclear materials from Niger. The *Guardian* took the lead in following up on allegations that the United States had bugged offices of several E.U. delegations to the United Nations. (There’s a special irony here, since the U.S. press largely reported without comment President Bush’s citation of Iraqi surveillance of U.N. inspectors as an 11th-hour *casus belli*.)

The mere existence of these articles illustrates that the true story of this war continues to be choreographed as much in the boardrooms and the backrooms as it is on the battlefield. The American press in Iraq enjoys unprecedented access to military personnel and actual battles, and can’t stop crowing about it. Bush spokesman Ari Fleischer continues to stonewall inquiries into the president’s own views and opinions on the war, and

gently chides his flock in the West Wing that “the best place to go get operational information about the war is not from the White House.” Only in America would this disavowal of executive involvement in national defense be a comfort.

The Internet’s audience can hardly be said to be represent the nation as a whole. Yet increased interest in foreign coverage of domestic matters sparks some hope that the Chicago investors intent on starting a liberal radio news network have an audience waiting for them. Whether the network will succeed in reaching that audience is another matter.

Radio has the most concentrated ownership of all broadcast media: Just four companies take in 90 percent of all ad revenue. The largest company, Clear Channel, owns more than 1,200 stations, takes in 20 percent of all radio advertising dollars, and every day reaches 54 percent of all people in the United States ages 18 to 49. This is hardly, as one of the Chicago backers put it, a “hole in the market you could drive a truck through.”

Clear Channel’s pro-war rallies are good ways to butter up the Bush administration.

Clear Channel maintains its stranglehold on the American market in large part due to the willful deregulatory campaign waged by FCC Chairman Michael Powell. For Clear Channel, the corporation behind Rush Limbaugh, the series of “support our troops” rallies it sponsored across the country might have just been a way of saying “thank you” to the administration that has helped them so much. Then again, it might be just more buttering up. Regulations on media ownership are under review this year, and ginning up support for the administration’s war is a good way to sweeten the \$100,000 the company donated to Republican candidates in 2002.

Speakers at the Clear Channel rallies have a word for people who make such speculations. At a rally in Richmond, Virginia, Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa) called them “un-American.” ■

Fighting Awful War Coverage

By Susan J. Douglas

Now that Team Bush has gotten its way and unilaterally launched an invasion of Iraq, those of us who oppose this immoral madness are sick at heart. It's easy to feel impotent and, worst of all, like exiles in our own country. That is certainly one of the top goals of the Bush Board of Directors: to convince us that we are a tiny, marginal, unrepresentative minority.

This is false. While more Americans support this war than many of us would like, 52 percent of those polled by CBS from March 7 to 9 wanted to give the arms inspectors more time, and 42 percent disapproved of how Bush was handling the situation in Iraq. (51 percent approved.) This is hardly a mandate for an unprovoked war. But if you run the country like a CEO of a privately held company, then you don't need the support of anyone, not even the stockholders. Team Bush to U.S. citizens: Screw you.

But one group Team Bush has sought to cultivate has been the press, with some success. CNN for months cast the war as inevitable. Rather than keep the press away from the war, a mistake that daddy made, Team Bush has developed "embedding," in which journalists are treated like Moonies. They live, eat and breathe with the troops and see, hear and report only what commanding officers want them to. Most of us are seeing the war through the eyes of U.S. commanders and hired military experts, unless we get Canadian news on cable or go online to read the international press.

But in this hour of darkness, I'd like to suggest some things we can do to combat the media's erasure of the dissent of tens of millions of Americans who love

their country, who support the troops sent needlessly into harm's way, and who think that Team Bush consists of a bunch of arrogant, megalomaniac quasi-fascists. In addition to the demonstrations and vigils, the petitions and the e-mails to Congress, we really need to become much bigger pests to the mindless flag-wavers in the media and more vocal supporters of those like Paul Krugman of the *New York Times*, whose unflagging criticism of Team Bush



mendacity has been a godsend. Here are some beginning proposals.

First, contact CNN and insist that right-winger Lou Dobbs' *Moneyline*—which has morphed from a financial tip sheet into a major prime-time news program—be removed from its 6 p.m. time slot. Dobbs is not a national affairs journalist, he knows nothing about covering the world or a war, and he is a

pugnacious ideologue who does not disguise his views. By June 2002, he was calling for a "war against Islamists." At 6 p.m., when many viewers are getting home and turning on their TVs to get a wrap-up of the day's events, they deserve at least the pretense of objectivity. But with Dobbs they get wishful thinking about international support for the war presented as fact, sycophantic tributes to the "insight" and "counsel" of

CNN's cheerleading military analysts, praise for "the intelligence" of the American people because polls indicate they support the war, and diatribes against those who criticize Team Bush. Concerns about Rumsfeld's military strategy were "nonsense" and unpatriotic "carping." CNN should find the show embarrassing and unprofessional. It belongs on Fox.

Second, watch *The Daily Show* on Comedy Central, the only TV show I know that has relentlessly exposed the lunacy and cynicism of Team Bush policies. Just a few nights before the war, host Jon Stewart showed an excerpt from Bush's March 17 ultimatum speech, in which he warned Saddam Hussein and his military not to destroy Iraqi oil fields because they belong "to the Iraqi people." Stewart then, to the great delight of the studio audience, cut to a shot of Cheney with a plumed turban on his head, and said, "he added, 'Iraqi people like Da-eeek Cheney of Al-Aburton.'" Stewart has kept it up as the war has unfolded, and the show's irreverent response to Team Bush's pomposity has

As Jon Stewart put it, this war is for Iraqis like "Da-eeek Cheney of Al-Aburton."

been a real bright spot in an often dispiriting media landscape.

Third, keep pestering news outlets about coverage of the humanitarian disaster that is already ensuing. We already know from the last Gulf War that there will be too many stories that position viewers as armchair generals, asking us to identify with the brass instead of innocent civilians, many of whom are children, or even with our own troops.

Finally, get together with friends whenever you can to watch the news and take notes about what you find outrageous. Post these in the reader forum at www.inthesetimes.com. And send them, in droves, to the corporate media. They are hearing way too much from administration officials, retired generals and right-wing cranks. They need to hear a lot more from us. ■



CNN *Moneyline*'s Lou Dobbs: Cheerleader for Team Bush.

EROT STONY

By Joel Bleifuss

Michael Moore Stars at Academy Awards

On day five of the war, it was supremely ironic that network television viewers had to tune into the 75th Annual Academy Awards ceremony to hear voices that questioned the wisdom of the Bush administration.

Rumblings of protest began on Saturday, March 22, at the Independent Spirit Awards (the award ceremony for independent films) in Santa Monica, California. Maggie Gyllenhaal, the star of *Secretary*, said the country was "in the middle of a war about oil and imperialism, and I hope for peace as soon as we can possibly find it."

That same afternoon at the Miramax party, crooner Michael Feinstein couldn't rouse the guests to sing "God Bless America" no matter how hard he tried.

Then there was ABC's presentation of the Academy Awards on March 23. Steve Martin got the ball rolling: "I am really glad they cut back on the red carpet, that'll send them a message." Minutes later, he followed up with, "A movie star is many things: they can be tall, short, thin ... or skinny. They can be Democrats ... or skinny."

The political statements ranged from the subdued to the outraged. Susan Sarandon, like many others wearing the Dove of Peace pins designed by Henry Dunay for Global Vision for Peace, flashed a peace sign. Chris Cooper, winner of the best supporting actor for his role in *Adaptation*, quietly said, "In light of all the troubles in this world, I wish us peace."

Gael Garcia Bernal, the hunky star of *Tu Mamá También*, introducing the nominated best song from *Frida*, said to loud applause: "The necessity for peace in the



"Anytime you have the Pope and the Dixie Chicks against you, your time is up," said Michael Moore as he accepted the Oscar for *Bowling for Columbine*.

world is not a dream, it is a reality. And we are not alone. If Frida was alive, she would be on our side, against war."

Pedro Almodovar, accepting the Oscar for best original screenplay for *Talk to Her*, read a statement: "I also want to dedicate this award to all the people who are raising their voices in favor of peace, respect of human rights, democracy and international legality, all of which are essential qualities to live."

And the audience cheered as Adrien Brody, who won best actor for *The Pianist*, admonished the orchestra to stop so he could say, "Whether you believe in Allah or God, may he watch over you, and pray for a peaceful and swift resolution to this war."

In a veiled protest against the war, which went unreported, Bono, lead singer of U2, sang "The Hands that Built America" from *Gangs of New York*, changing two lines of the song. Instead of:

It's early fall, there is a cloud on the
New York skyline,
Innocents across a yellow line.

Bono sang,

Late in the spring, yellow cloud on a
desert skyline,
Some father's son, is it his or is it mine?

And then there was Michael Moore. He received a standing ovation when *Bowling for Columbine* was announced the winner of best documentary. The *Chicago Tribune's* Mark Caro reported that the pressroom also erupted in applause when it was announced that Moore had won.

Taking the stage, flanked by documentary filmmakers, Moore said:

I've invited my fellow documentary nominees on the stage with us. They are here in solidarity with me because we like nonfiction. We like nonfiction and we live in fictitious times. We live in a time when we have fictitious election results that elect a fictitious president. We live in a time where we have a man sending us to war for fictitious reasons, whether it is the fiction of duct tape or the fiction of orange alerts. We are against this war, Mr. Bush. Shame on you, Mr. Bush. Shame on you. And any time that you have the Pope and the Dixie Chicks against you, your time is up.

John Horn of the *Los Angeles Times* reported that "as Moore's speech reached its crescendo" Academy Award producer Gil Cates and director Louis Horvitz, who were in the production truck, decided "to cut him off. 'Music! Music!' Horvitz yelled. The orchestra quickly drowned out the rest of Moore's speech." And his microphone receded into the floor.

Some of the Hollywood audience smiled and applauded, some appeared stunned, and a contingent in an upper balcony booed, but stagehands, who were close to the microphones, booed loudly, making it appear to a television listener that Moore's criticism of President Bush was not well received.

Speaking to reporters, Moore kept up his criticism. These remarks were well reported by the *Tribune's* Mark Caro and the *Chicago Sun-Times* Bill Zwecker, but most of the national media ignored them.

Reporter: Why did you do what you did?

Moore: I'm an American.

Reporter: That's it?

Moore: Well, that's a lot. I'm an American, and you don't leave your citizenship when you enter the doors of the Kodak Theatre. ... I don't stop being who I am when I come to this ceremony, and I'm extremely grateful for this response.

Moore wanted it made clear that despite the loud boos from the stagehands, most in the Hollywood audience were behind him: "Don't report that there was a split decision in the hall because five people booed," he said. "I did not hear that. I saw the entire place stand up and applaud, applaud a film that talks about how we are manipulated by the fear that's put forth by the White House and put forth by corporate America to create a culture of violence at home and abroad."

Noting that his book *Stupid White Men* is on the nonfiction bestseller list, Moore said, "My finger's on the pulse of where I think the majority of Americans are at, and I think it would be irresponsible of me not to say what I felt. I don't think anyone who voted for me for this award thought they'd get a speech about agents and lawyers or the lawyers of agents." America, he said, is "not divided ... the majority of Americans do not want to see their boys or girls killed in this war. The majority of people do not want to see our

democracy hijacked by the squatter on federal land at 1600 Pennsylvania. I just happen to believe in one person, one vote, and you count all the votes."

Most of the national media, in their role as wartime cheerleaders, reported that Moore was roundly booed. Kurt Loder of MTV, reporting on Michael Moore's "witless flip-out," wrote: "Moore's spittle-flecked undulations were so over-the-top, that even the Oscar crowd—his natural constituency, you might think—erupted in a storm of boos. This was *totally* unexpected."

Are Loder et al. softening us up for another Hollywood blacklist? The group Boycott Hollywood, www.boycothollywood.us, already wants to dim the lights of 94 outspoken stars.

A statement released earlier in the month by the Screen Actors Guild put it this way: "Some have recently suggested that well-known individuals who express 'unacceptable' views should be punished by losing their right to work. This shocking development suggests that the lessons of history have, for some, fallen on deaf ears."

Men of Principle?

Ever wondered what Elliot Abrams, Jeb Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz and Frank Gaffney were all doing back on June 3, 1997? They were publishing the *New American Century's* "Statement of Principles," which reads in part:

Conservatives have not confidently advanced a strategic vision of America's role in the world. ... We aim to change this. ... Does the United States have the resolve to shape a new century favorable to American principles and interests? ... If we shirk our responsibilities, we invite challenges to our fundamental interests. The history of the 20th century should have taught us that it is important to shape circumstances before crises emerge, and to meet threats before they become dire. The history of this century should have taught us to embrace the cause of American leadership. ... We need to accept responsibility for America's unique role in preserving and extending an international order friendly to our security, our prosperity and our principles. Such a Reaganite policy of military strength and moral clarity may not be fashionable today. But it is necessary if

the United States is to build on the success of this past century and to ensure our security and our greatness in the next.

General Advice

Retired Marine Gen. Joseph P. Hoar, who skewered the Pentagon's Iraqi war plans on the op-ed page of the April 2 *New York Times*, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee last September. His advice to the Senate, which went unreported at the time, bears repeating. He said in part:

War on terrorism is perhaps a useful slogan, but terrorism is not an ideology or a political movement or a sovereign country; it is a technique used to achieve either a political or military result, not unlike strategic bombing. While I am in no way condoning the activities of al-Qaeda and the terrorist attacks ... it is still important to look beyond this activity to find what are the causative factors. ... What is at stake are the minds and hearts of the 1 billion Muslims throughout the world. ... Their quarrel with the United States is that they do not trust our government. The reason for this is a pattern of behavior perpetrated by the U.S. government in South Asia and the Middle East over the last 20 years. They believe the U.S. government has acted unilaterally, sometimes as a bully, and has sometimes used other nations for its own interests and abandoned them when the objective has been achieved. Most importantly, they believe the U.S. has unjustly supported Israel over the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Prescient

During the first Gulf War, David Rubenstein wrote in the February 27, 1991 issue of *In These Times*:

Anyone who has talked to religious Muslims from the region must be concerned that no matter how decisively George Bush can knock out Iraq, in fact he has started a bloody conflict with a much larger and more diffuse opponent, a conflict that will not be resolved for many years, perhaps decades or longer ... think of it as an entitlement program: Every kid born in America gets a share of a trillion-dollar debt and a free ticket to a holy war. ■



The Road from Baghdad

*The Bush team has big plans for the 21st century.
Can the rest of the world stop them?*

By David Moberg

Contrary to the smug pronouncements from the Bush administration, it is foolhardy to predict how the war in Iraq will end, let alone when. Considering how unpopular Saddam Hussein is among both Iraqis and their neighbors, it is stunning how quickly the American invasion increased support in and outside of the country for Saddam—or at least resentment of Americans.

Iraqis may still rebel against a faltering regime, but the blustering predictions from Bush's top officials that the war would be a speedy "cakewalk," punctuated by cheering crowds, against a government that was "a house of cards" proved wrong. They were soon followed by recriminations about flaws in the invasion strategy, including the number of troops permitted by Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, over the advice of some generals. It is equally possible that the war will drag on for many months with bloody urban warfare in the streets of Baghdad while irregular forces harass the long U.S. supply lines from Kuwait.

No matter how the war eventually ends, the long-term consequences are likely to be damaging. First, there are the immediate victims of this war, and those of future wars that its strategists already anticipate. But the fallout looks bad for both the world as a whole and the majority of people in the United States. A quick end to the war, with Saddam largely forced out by a popular uprising, would be the least damaging outcome, but even that might embolden the United States to act more unilaterally and aggressively in the future. Even a short war will leave the world with new fault lines and wreck global institutions, like the United Nations, leaving only remote prospects for a progressive



GETTY IMAGES

alternative to dominance by a rogue superpower. The triumph of democracy in the Middle East, despite White House rhetoric, is neither the real objective nor a probable result.

But truth was not simply the first casualty of war: Lies and misinformation were the very foundations of the public buildup to war. They ranged from forged documents to a media campaign that convinced more than half of Americans, without a shred of evidence, that Iraq was behind the 9/11 attacks. The rosy scenarios of victory, besides encouraging the self-delusion of the administration's war ideologues, were essential parts of the disinformation campaign to persuade an American public that was, all things considered, fairly skeptical. The invented rationales were flimsy and shifting at best because the truth would not have sold well anywhere, even in the United States.

The truth is that hawkish neoconservatives, with roots in the Reagan administration, had pushed for overthrowing Saddam long before September 11, 2001. This faction included Rumsfeld, Vice President Dick Cheney, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, Undersecretary of State John Bolton, Defense Policy Board member Richard Perle (who resigned as chairman of the board after conflicts of interest were exposed), and the frankly imperialist Project for a New American Century.

With the demise of the Soviet Union as a geopolitical rival, the neocons wanted to use the United States' stature as the sole superpower to wield military might without constraint. Promoting American global corporations and limited government, they wanted to remake the planet in what they see as national self-interest and to prevent any countervailing power from emerging in the world. Their free-market fundamentalism conveniently meshes with a religious fundamentalism that pervades the Bush administration and taps into deep-seated American beliefs in this country's divine mission—creating, in the phrase of author Tariq Ali, a “clash of fundamentalisms” with both retrograde Islamicists and a relatively secular tyrant like Saddam.

Iraq was a convenient first target, but many in this faction have made it clear that they have a long list of other targets of opportunity, from Iran to North Korea and beyond (the Chinese are feeling particularly threatened). Besides the terrorist excuse, Iraq is important for its oil. A new report from the Institute for Policy Studies, using previously unpublished government papers, documents how Rumsfeld and other Reagan aides worked closely with Saddam from 1983 to 1987—after public revelation of his use of poison gas in his war with Iran—in an ultimately failed bid to help Bechtel Corporation construct a new pipeline for Iraqi oil.

Some strategists also hold to a misguided notion that attacking Iraq might help Israel, rather than simply fan existing hatreds. But the main political objective seems to be the exercise and consolidation of American global power. The irony—or tragedy, given the number of probable casualties—is that this flagrant use of U.S. military power is likely to actually hasten the decline of American global political power.

The Bush administration strategy, as played out in Iraq, represents a break with the past, but less dramatically than many Bush critics acknowledge. In a strong critique of Bush's unilateralism, *Newsweek* editor Fareed Zakaria wrote, “The real question is how America should wield its power. For the past half century, it has done so through alliances and global institutions and in a consensual manner.” There have been occasional examples of global cooperation by the United States that also represented enlightened self-interest, such as the Marshall Plan after

World War II. But more typically, the United States has for decades sought to make global institutions and alliances subservient to its strategic aims, often bullying and bribing allies of questionable character as much as winning real consensus.

America also has a long and sordid history of backing corrupt and undemocratic regimes, including Saddam himself, making it suspect now as a putative defender of democracy. Often it has acted unilaterally—even pre-emptively—against alleged threats, such as in Grenada (where afterwards even the United States acknowledged there was no threat) or Panama. But the need to compete ideologically with communism as well as to compete with the Soviet Union for political allegiances of many countries often constrained the United States and forced some consensuality.

The demise of the Soviet bloc gave the United States a new freedom of action. Both the Bush I and Clinton administrations in different ways continued to balance multilateralism and international consensus with American unilateralism. But the current

Bush administration has made a flagrant point of abandoning global agreements, multilateralism and international organizations, while asserting its right to pre-emptively make war on its own, effectively repudiating the fundamental principles of the United Nations charter. The shift in national strategy is underlined by a new undiplomatic, swaggering style exhibited by officials from Rumsfeld to Bush himself.

The 9/11 attacks momentarily created a sense of sympathy for the United States that offset rising worldwide unease about Bush's cowboy foreign policy, but the war in Iraq has intensified new splits. First is the division between the United States and most governments in the world. The “coalition” fighting in Iraq consists of U.S., British and a small number of Australian troops,

but even the entire list of governments offering verbal support—including those too ashamed or fearful of their own constituents to do so publicly—is relatively small and unenthusiastic, or even listed without the country's awareness, as in the case of Colombia and Slovenia. Nor is it a particularly inspiring list. According to a *Foreign Policy in Focus* report, 17 of the 45 are described by Freedom House as “not free” or “partially free,” nearly half had significant corruption, and 9 had “extremely poor” human rights records, according to the State Department.

The high-profile splits within Europe endanger continental political integration, which may please Bush officials. But the broader antagonism between the United States and most governments of the world will hurt any ability of the United States to win international cooperation on fighting terrorism. Ultimately, this schism will encourage other countries to seek new alliances to offset or restrain American power, potentially

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Hussein.*



increasing tensions if the Bush strategy of being the world's unipolar power continues. While the Bush administration may be pleased to undermine the United Nations, it may be less happy with damage to NATO.

The governmental schism will also undercut U.S. efforts on trade and global economic agreements, as well as its use of the International Monetary Fund and other global financial institutions to promote the "Washington consensus." That could be a blessing in disguise. But the United States may also suffer economically if countries prefer other currencies to the dollar, such as the euro, shun U.S. corporations or products, or adopt more nationalist stances in trade disputes. Unilateral aggressiveness also increases instability, which depresses investment and growth but can also create other disturbances, like oil price hikes. By militarily and unilaterally asserting its dominance, the United States may undermine the globalization policies that have benefited the biggest multinational corporations. However, the victims of contemporary globalization are likely to suffer as well in a more fractious, unstable world economy.

Another split is broader and deeper—the schism between the United States and the world's people. With the sole exception of Israel, even in countries whose governments support the U.S. war effort, there is strong—usually overwhelming—majority opposition. The backlash goes beyond a single policy. Within the past half-year, in most countries the feeling of general admiration for the United States has plummeted, often to no more than tiny minorities. With such popular antagonism to the United States, politicians in those countries will have much more to gain by appealing to anti-American sentiments and by standing up to Washington, rather than risking hostility from their own people.

Throughout much of the world, good feelings about the United States have long translated into political influence and economic advantage. The United States is losing much of that thanks to Bush's war. It's quite an achievement to squander the goodwill from 9/11 and, for all practical purposes, to lose a popularity contest with a thug like Saddam Hussein in less than two years. Those, however, are Bush's primary foreign policy accomplishments. He is now unintentionally working to convince people around the world that Osama bin Laden's view of the United States is correct, just as he is helping recruit new anti-American terrorists.

Indeed, the Bush strategy increases the odds that any destabilization of the corrupt and undemocratic governments of the Middle East will lead to Islamic fundamentalist regimes rather than liberal democratic republics. For many decades, the United States allied with conservative leaders to suppress progressive and secular movements in the Middle East, leaving right-wing religious fundamentalist populism as one of the few channels of protest. Now some analysts are using the common failures of undeveloped countries that possess oil wealth to develop political democracies as an excuse for turning over the oil wealth to private, foreign corporations.

Ultimately, the unilateral exercise of American power is likely to undermine American leadership. "Real power is influence

and example, backed up by understated reminders of military force," argues New York University professor Tony Judt in a recent issue of *The New York Review of Books*. "When a great power has to buy its allies, bribe its friends, and blackmail its critics, something is amiss." Judt criticizes the work of Robert Kagan, an apologist for American unilateralism and the war in Iraq, for misunderstanding European desires for international cooperation as wimpy pacifism. He also chides Kagan for ignoring the role of the United States—presented by Kagan as the only world power ready and able to fight for freedom—in creating international institutions from which it has benefited. With the end of the Cold War, the United States had an opportunity to use its wealth and power to create stronger international institutions that could have encouraged democracy and peaceful resolution of conflicts. But the Bush crowd wants neither of those: It simply wants American power.

On the eve of the war, a Gallup poll showed Americans opposing by 50 to 47 percent a war on Iraq without going to the U.N. Security Council for a second resolution. Although support for the war rose sharply with the invasion, it is likely to decline as time passes and casualties mount. But the divisions in the United States are also likely to have economic dimensions. Bush avoided putting a price tag on the war until after the invasion, then asked for \$75 billion for this fiscal year, assuming a six-week war and allowing very little for any cost of occupation or reconstruction of the country. If the fighting persists, the cost will go up. Combined with even the Senate's scaled-down tax cut, the cost of the war—not to mention future unilateral adventures—will further squeeze budgets for programs that help the majority of Americans.

Furthermore, if the war goes badly, we are likely to see an intensification of militarist propaganda and repression against dissent from both the administration and the right-wing media, where cable channel "news" wars are already narrowing the range of voices most Americans hear about the war. But will the Democrats, as an alternative to the Bush imperial strategy, be willing to argue for American leadership in developing new multilateral, cooperative international strategies as a better path to national security and a more just and stable world?

If the United States does not shift gears and assume such a role under a new Democratic administration, it is unclear whether Europe could or would take the lead, especially if it means challenging U.S. policy. The alternative might be a more fragmented, multipolar world, including an Islamic community increasingly resentful of the United States but providing a reactionary option that is worse than what the United States advocates. The global justice movement against corporate globalization has less to offer on international security than on international trade, and it can claim few, if any, governments in power that share its vision.

Public opinion worldwide may be massively against the war in Iraq and against the emerging U.S. international strategy, but it does not yet constitute a coherent force for a new approach to promoting both justice and peace globally by containing rogue leaders—from Saddam Hussein to George W. Bush. ■

Why blacks are skeptical of war

Not Our Fight?

By Salim Muwakkil

A variety of national polls have revealed that African-Americans are as much as three times more likely than whites to oppose U.S. military action in Iraq. A Gallup poll released March 28, for example, found that 68 percent of black Americans opposed the war, while only 20 percent of whites did. Other polls found similar divides.

These strikingly disparate views surprise some, given the paucity of black faces at the major anti-war protests. They also are surprising, given the disproportionately large numbers of African-Americans who serve in the armed forces. Black recruits make up 22 percent of enlisted personnel in all branches of the armed forces, nearly double their representation in the population. Half of all enlisted women in the Army are black, while 38 percent are white.

Many African-Americans are attracted to the military because it provides opportunities sorely lacking in civilian life. In fact, the U.S. military is among the most desegregated institutions in American life. Cynics may argue that this is so because the armed forces need cannon fodder, but the reasons are more complicated and perhaps less malign.

According to a Defense Department report, African-Americans in the armed forces earn an average of \$32,000 per year, compared with the average African-American salary in the private sector of \$27,900. What's more, the military is a strong supporter of affirmative action and has even offered a legal brief to the Supreme Court in its latest deliberation on the matter.

And yet despite African-Americans' disproportionate presence in the military (or perhaps because of it), the black community is not gung ho for military action. "It has to do with black folks' tradition of opposition to war," explains Ronald Walters, a professor of political science at the University of Maryland. "We join the services and take part in war, but we often are opposed to it for moral reasons."

African-American views on the Iraq conflict confirm that tradition. "All the way through the debate on the war, blacks have been less supportive," Carroll Doherty, of the Washington-based Pew Research Center, told *Newsday*. "It's such an interesting finding, and I think a lot of people put their own interpretation on it."

The tradition of war opposition is amplified by African-Americans' antipathy for President George W. Bush and the right-wing regime he fronts; they don't trust an administration that has turned its back on some of the black community's most essential issues. African-Americans routinely are told that the government has insufficient funds to improve their relatively dismal state of housing, health care and education, yet it seems to easily find the funds to conduct an illegal invasion of Iraq and the subsequent reconstruction.

This is an historical pattern of duplicity that is familiar to African-Americans. From the early days of the republic, when a Constitution extolling freedom tolerated slavery, blacks have learned to be suspicious of American leadership. Those suspicions have been vindicated through centuries of brutal and dismissive treatment from white leadership.

Bush has a particularly heavy onus to overcome because of the fiasco of the 2000 elections. While most Americans may have put Bush's dubious ascension behind them, many African-Americans still view him as an illegitimate president. Although the events of September 11, 2001 have somewhat softened African-Americans' negative views of Bush, the president remains widely unpopular in the black community. "This is George Bush's war, and African-Americans neither trust nor like George Bush," says David Bositis, senior political analyst at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

The Congressional Black Caucus has also been in the front lines of opposition to the Iraqi invasion. Thirty-four of the 38 caucus members last year voted against giving Bush the authority to go to war, and since the invasion, many still express opposition, though they are careful to note support for American troops.

Rep. Charles Rangel (D-New York) has been one of the caucus' most vocal opponents of war. He also has been pushing a bill that would restore the draft, a maneuver that is widely seen as an attempt to embarrass pro-war legislators for supporting a conflict in which few of their children will have to fight. Rangel argues that the country's minorities and poor will bear the brunt of U.S. belligerence.

Rep. Barbara Lee (D-California) is also a vocal critic of U.S. military action in the region. In fact, she was way out in front of the pack, as the only House member to vote against a 2001 resolution authorizing President Bush to use force against anyone associated with the 9/11 attacks.

Some commentators have interpreted blacks' lack of enthusiasm for war as a lack of patriotism. This is an old accusation, and it has roots in the Revolutionary War, when thousands of enslaved Africans escaped bondage and joined the British army. These escapees were derided as traitors by the rebellious colonies, although the British "enemy" offered them freedom from slavery. The Continental leadership failed to understand how their repressive treatment of African-Americans did little to fuel black patriotism. And yet despite those perverse incentives, thousands of black men eventually joined the Continental army to fight the British—although with considerable ambivalence.

The incentives today are not quite so perverse, but African-Americans still remain skeptical of U.S. military adventure. ■



OUTSIDE THE BOX

Another Diplomat Resigns

Mary Ann Wright is a former army colonel and a career diplomat who helped re-open the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan. On March 19, she sent a letter of resignation, excerpted below, to Secretary of State Colin Powell. She is the third American diplomat to resign over the war in Iraq.

Dear Secretary Powell:

When I last saw you in Kabul in January 2002 you arrived to officially open the U.S. Embassy that I had helped re-establish in December 2001 as the first political officer. At that time I could not have imagined that I would be writing a year later to resign from the Foreign Service because of U.S. policies. All my adult life I have been in service to the United States. I have been a diplomat for 15 years and the Deputy Chief of Mission in our embassies in Sierra Leone, Micronesia, Afghanistan (briefly) and Mongolia. I have also had assignments in

Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Grenada and Nicaragua. I received the State Department's Award for Heroism as charge d'affaires during the evacuation of Sierra Leone in 1997. I was 26 years in the U.S. Army/Army Reserves and participated in civil reconstruction projects after military operations in Grenada, Panama and Somalia. I attained the rank of colonel during my military service.

This is the only time in my many years serving America that I have felt I cannot represent the policies of an administration of the United States. I disagree with the administration's policies on Iraq, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, North Korea and curtailment of civil liberties in the United States itself. I feel obligated morally and professionally to set out my very deep and firm concerns on these policies and to resign from government service as I cannot defend or implement them. ...

I wrote this letter five weeks ago and held it hoping that the administration would not go to war against Iraq at this time without U.N. Security Council agreement. I strongly believe that going to war now will make the world more dangerous, not safer.

I strongly believe the probable response of many Arabs of the region and Muslims of the world will result in actions extraordinarily dangerous to America and Americans. Military action now without Security Council agreement is much more dangerous for America and the world than allowing the U.N. weapons inspections to proceed and subsequently taking authorized action if warranted.

I firmly believe the probability of Saddam using weapons of mass destruction is low, as he knows that using those weapons will trigger an immediate, strong and justified international response. There will be no question of action against Saddam in that case. I strongly disagree with the use of a "pre-emptive attack" against Iraq and believe that this preemptive attack policy will be used against us and provide justification for individuals and groups to "pre-emptively attack" America and American citizens. ...

I have served my country for almost 30 years in some of the most isolated and dangerous parts of the world. I want to continue to serve America. It is with heavy heart that I must end my service to America and therefore resign due to the administration's policies.

Very Respectfully,

Mary A. Wright
U.S. Embassy, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
March 19, 2003

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Backlash Against Al Jazeera

By Elizabeth Ptacek

Qatar-based news network Al Jazeera has taken a beating for its efforts to show, in detail, the human toll of the war in Iraq. Although Al Jazeera's war coverage was aided in part by the Pentagon, which initially offered the network four of its coveted "embedded" positions, officials in the United States and Britain are now accusing the network of "disgraceful behavior." Al Jazeera broadcasts have included footage of coalition POWs and gruesome coverage of casualties suffered on both sides, including Iraqi civilians.

In an interview with CNN's *Late Edition*, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld chastised networks, like Al Jazeera, which chose to air Iraqi-conducted interviews with American POWs, saying that the interviews violated the Geneva conventions. Human Rights Watch issued a response criticizing both the Iraqi regime and the United States. The "provision protecting POWs from 'public curiosity' [in the Geneva conventions] appears to have been violated by both the Iraqi and the U.S. governments," the group wrote.

In an interview on NPR, Secretary of State Colin Powell also complained, "Al Jazeera has an editorial line and a way presenting news that appeals to the Arab public. They ... magnify the minor successes of the regime. And they tend to portray our efforts in a negative light."

At press time, repercussions for Al Jazeera's coverage have extended far beyond Rumsfeld's and Powell's disapproval. After the network posted images of American POWs, hackers attacked the network's English and Arabic Web sites. The all-Arabic Al Jazeera had sought to expand its distribution by launching an English language Web site on March 24. By the following day, both Al Jazeera's English and Arabic Web sites were inaccessible due to constant cyber attacks. In one such attack, a group calling itself the "Freedom Cyber Force Militia" managed to reroute visitors to a Web site featuring a U.S. stars and stripes logo. Al Jazeera has since been able to restore the sites (though on European servers: Its U.S. Web hosting company, DataPipe, withdrew service, saying the hacking was having adverse effects on other customers).

Moreover, the NYSE decided to revoke Al Jazeera's credentials just days after the network angered U.S. government officials with its war coverage. Citing "security precautions," the spokesman said, "We've had to focus our efforts on networks that focus on responsible business coverage." Al Jazeera had provided business coverage from the NYSE for more than five years and has an audience of more than 35 million people worldwide.

Nasdaq quickly followed suit. Spurned by the NYSE, Al Jazeera asked for access to the Nasdaq trading forum to continue its coverage of the U.S. stock exchange; its request was also denied. A spokesman told the *Los Angeles Times* that Nasdaq's decision came "in light of Al Jazeera's recent conduct during the war, in which they have broadcast footage of U.S. POWs in alleged violation of the Geneva Convention."

Faisal Bodi, the senior editor for Aljazeera.net, denounced his network's poor reception in a March 28 *Guardian* editorial. "Of all the major global networks, Al Jazeera has been alone in proceeding from the premise that this war should be viewed as an illegal enterprise," Bodi wrote. "It has broadcast the horror of the bombing campaign, the blown-out brains, the blood-spattered pavements, the screaming infants and the corpses."

Recently, Al Jazeera has also broadcast reports debunking coalition claims of an uprising in Basra on March 25, its correspondent claiming that there was no sign of anti-Saddam rioting in the city. British Prime Minister Tony Blair later conceded reports of the event were "confused."

Meanwhile, Iraq expelled an Al Jazeera reporter on April 2. The Iraqi government—the same one that supposedly uses Al Jazeera as a propaganda instrument—banished the network reporter for conducting

interviews unsupervised by a government monitor.

A March 26 *New York Times* editorial defended the network, saying, "Al Jazeera is feisty and frequently controversial, but it does real journalism, and it is the only uncensored TV network in the Arab world."

Or as an Al Jazeera correspondent told Reuters: "We want to show it as it is." ■



Al Jazeera's coverage has gotten it kicked out of both the New York Stock Exchange and Iraq.



Crude History Lesson

By Dave Lindorff

The Bush administration has come up with many excuses for attacking Iraq—Saddam Hussein used poison gas, he possesses or is developing weapons of mass destruction, he is a brutal tyrant—but the one thing it insists is that the war is not about oil. As Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stated in November: “There are certain things like that, myths that are floating around. It has nothing to do with oil, literally nothing to do with oil.”

But a new study by three researchers at the Institute for Policy Studies, based upon previously unpublished documents, shows not only that oil is at the root of the conflict, but Rumsfeld was in the thick of the effort to get that oil. A sort of mini-Pentagon Papers account of the history of American diplomatic and economic relations with Iraq since the early days of the Reagan administration, the study (available in full at www.ips-dc.org/crudevision/crude_vision.pdf) shows that a whole host of Reagan administration officials, together with the Bechtel Corporation, spent years trying to win Saddam Hussein's approval for a new oil pipeline to run west from the Euphrates River oil fields to Jordan and on to the Gulf of Aqaba. The goal was to establish an alternate route for shipping Arab oil that would avoid the Persian Gulf and Straits of Hormuz, which were seen as vulnerable to Iranian attack.

In an effort to win Hussein's approval for this multibillion-dollar pipeline, to be built by the Bechtel Corporation with the help of Export-Import Bank funding, Rumsfeld met with Saddam and Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz on December 20, 1983. Rumsfeld, then CEO of the Searle pharmaceutical company, had been named by President Reagan as a special peace envoy. At the time of his visit, Iraq was in its bitter war with Iran, and was suspected of using chemical weapons against Iranian troops.

While Rumsfeld has insisted that his visit to Iraq was related to a peace mission, a State Department communication about the meeting quotes Rumsfeld as saying: “I raised the question of a pipeline through Jordan. [Aziz] said he was familiar with the proposal. ... However, he was concerned with the proximity to Israel as the pipeline would enter the Gulf of Aqaba. He seemed to feel that the only way to prevent Israel from attacking such a vulnerable point would be to have a number of countries involved. ... He said they are interested but need to find the right formula.”

There was no mention of Iraq's use of chemical weapons. On March 5, 1984, the State Department issued a public statement condemning Iraq's use of poison gas against Iran, but records obtained by IPS show that the U.S. government was continuing to promote the pipeline in private. On March 20, Bechtel executives met with Jordanian and Iraqi officials in Jordan about the pipeline. Then, on March 26, Rumsfeld returned to Iraq a second time to meet with

Yes, the war is about oil.

Aziz. That same day, the United Nations provided public confirmation that Iraq was using chemical weapons against Iran.

Again, documents relating to that visit show that the pipeline, not Iraq's use of weapons of mass destruction, was the issue. Two days earlier, before his trip, Rumsfeld had been briefed by Secretary of State George Schultz, who noted that U.S.-Iraq relations had been harmed by the department's earlier public condemnation of Iraq.

U.S. diplomat James Placke was dispatched to meet with Iraqi diplomat Kizam Hamdoon on April 6. At that session, Placke reportedly asked his Iraqi counterpart to make sure that Iraq did not “embarrass” the United States by purchasing its chemical weapons from U.S. suppliers. In a memo about that meeting, Schultz, a former president of Bechtel, wrote: “We would ask the government of Iraq's cooperation in avoiding situations that would lead to a difficult and potentially embarrassing situation.”

The IPS details how negotiations over the Aqaba pipeline continued through 1986, while Iraq continued to use chemical weapons in its brutal war with Iran. (Between 1983 and 1988, Iraq reportedly dropped more than 13,000 chemical bombs on Iran.) The deal was finally rejected by Iraq that year, in favor of cheaper pipelines through Turkey and Saudi Arabia. But, as the IPS authors write, “The fallout from Bechtel's failed pipeline initiative has been considerable.”

They describe the rejection of the plan as “a turn in U.S.-Iraq relations” and note that “many of the project's promoters became architects of the present Bush-Cheney campaign against Iraq.” This list includes Roger Robinson, co-founder of the Center for Strategic Policy, a think tank that has hatched numerous plans for invading Iraq, and Lawrence Eagleburger, the former Secretary of State who now serves on the boards of Halliburton and Phillips Petroleum.

With Bechtel and Vice President Dick Cheney's former company Halliburton in line for major contracts in the planned “rebuilding” of Iraq at the end of the current war, it's a fair bet that the once-canceled Aqaba pipeline will be back on the drawing board again. ■

Dave Lindorff, a regular contributor to In These Times, is the author of Killing Time, a new book on the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Prime Time Payola

*Is Clear Channel buying
political favors with
pro-war fanaticism?*

By Stephen Marshall

A feverish, corporate-sponsored nationalism has taken root in America at a time when the public depends on a vibrant communications culture to sustain its institutional democracy. Nowhere is this more clear than in the case of Clear Channel Communications, the nation's largest radio chain. In the outrage that followed the Floridian scandal and George Bush Jr.'s appointment by the Supreme Court to the Oval Office, many in the media missed an equally alarming familial maneuver. In one of his first bureaucratic decisions as president, Bush named Michael Powell, son of Secretary of State Colin Powell, as chairman of the Federal Communications Commission. That the son of one of the nation's most decorated and politically entrenched former military officers should be given control of the agency that regulates the domestic news and entertainment networks—indeed the whole telecommunications industry—is something that is more imaginable in ... well, Iraq.

Powell took over as chief regulator for a corporate communications industry in the throes of a radical transformation following the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which opened the door for deregulation and sparked widespread condemnation from media activists who saw the act as an attack on the public interest function of the FCC. The existing television and radio networks launched into mergers of unprecedented size, while new players with deep pockets were able to claim previously unthinkable levels of market share.

One of the act's most prominent benefactors was Clear Channel Communications, a relatively unknown broadcaster based in



San Antonio, Texas. Led by L. Lowry Mays, a rancher and one-time George W. Bush business associate, Clear Channel has ridden a wave of acquisitions, spending more than \$30 billion to become the world's largest radio broadcaster, concert promoter and billboard advertising firm. Clear Channel owns more than 1,200 radio stations (approximately 50 percent of the U.S. total), five times more than its closest competitors, CBS and ABC. Considering the fact that prior to the Telecommunications Act, a single broadcaster could not own more than 40 stations in the entire country, it is hard to see the behemoth as anything but a creation of the act itself.

But while Clear Channel's unhindered expansion is the result of the deregulation media barons crave, its growth has not been viewed favorably by the rest of the industry. With the FCC scheduled to review the last remaining set of protections on media diversity this spring, Big Media is worried that the upstart Texans will ruin it for everybody.



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And they have reason to be concerned. In January, Sen. John McCain's Commerce Committee held two hearings that targeted, among other things, the issue of media concentration. At the first hearing, Michael Powell and his four commissioners were subjected to intense questioning about their strategy to protect the public interest from "sky's the limit" deregulation. In a response that clearly surprised the committee, Powell, traditionally an unabashed proponent of the free market and loosened restrictions to ownership, said he was "concerned about the concentration, particularly in radio." Mediageek.com's Paul Riismandel explained: "Indeed, [Powell] didn't want much publicity or input ... But now the cat is out of the bag and yowling like crazy."

Smelling the blood of a close Bush ally, partisan Democrats on the committee, led by maverick Republican McCain, called new hearings to specifically examine "consolidation in the radio industry." As the committee's star witness, McCain summoned Clear Channel's Lowry Mays.

Mays was systematically skewered by the hostile committee and those invited to testify on behalf of the public (and private) interest. Rep. Howard Berman (D-California) catalogued charges to the Justice Department and the FCC against Clear Channel. These include anti-trust violations, payola and a form of tactical extortion in which monopolies over local concert bookings are

used to pressure record companies into buying radio spots, called "negative synergy." But, as we learned during the Enron hearings, lawmakers are less concerned with corporate criminality than they are with sustaining the corporate capitalism that perpetuates it. The committee's ranking Democrat, Sen. Ernest "Fritz" Hollings (D-South Carolina), emphasizing more savory bureaucratic concerns, lamented, "Radio consolidation has contributed to a 34 percent decline in the number of owners, a 90 percent rise in the cost of advertising rates, [and] a rise in indecent broadcasts. If ever there were a cautionary tale, this is it."

While most of the congressional debate over media concentration focuses on the diminished health of the marketplace, Clear Channel has revived traditional progressive fears that media concentration will negatively impact the breadth of dialogue permitted in the public sphere. Indeed, since 9/11 and the advent of Bush's "war on terror," Clear Channel has been the most sycophantic and pro-militarist Big Media corporation, which is saying a lot.

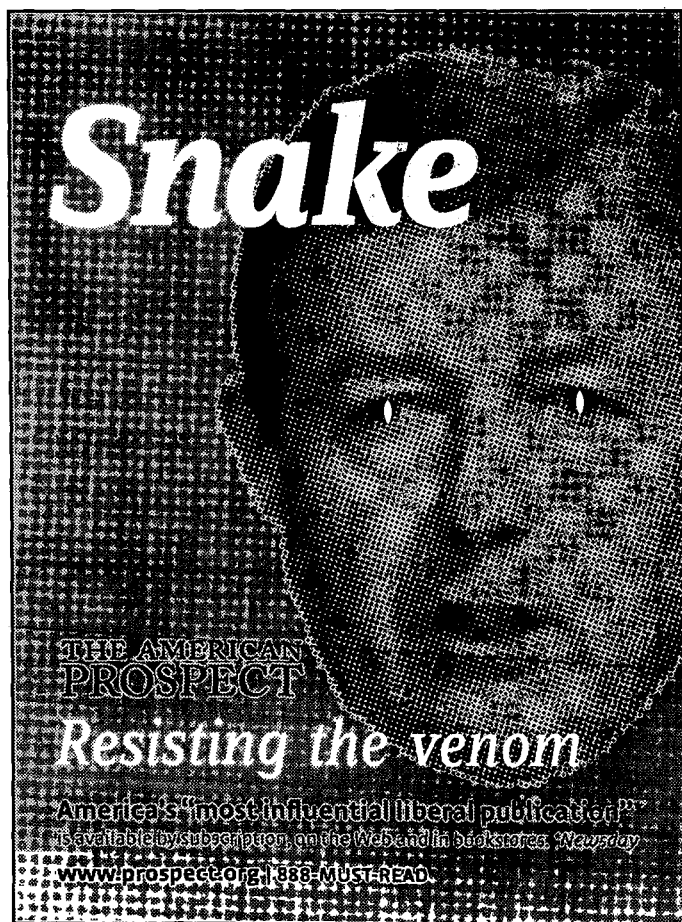
Just days after the 9/11 attacks, slates of blacklisted songs, including Cat Stevens' "Peace Train" and John Lennon's "Imagine," were leaked to the public. But it was not until the invasion of Iraq that Clear Channel really kicked into high gear. Facing the massive public outcry and protests against the war, the network began sponsoring pro-war rallies called "Rally for America." Using its 1,200 stations, Clear Channel pummeled listeners with a mind-numbing stream of uncritical "patriotism." Finally, there was the recent and gleeful banning of Dixie Chicks songs from several prominent Clear Channel stations after singer Natalie Maines made derogatory remarks about George W. Bush.

Perhaps Clear Channel is simply exercising its right to free expression and supporting the foreign policy initiatives of the current administration. This is hardly the first time that a major media network used its power to marginalize political beliefs that contradict those of its owners. However, one cannot deny the potential for a conflict of interest. Clear Channel is currently facing a major congressional investigation of its business practices. The FCC has blocked two of its most recent requests for station transfers, something that the commission has not done since 1969. Clear Channel's share price is down nearly 50 percent from the value it held before the 9/11 terrorist attacks. All this is coming at a time when the FCC is about to rule on the existing barriers to consolidation, a decision that could dramatically affect Clear Channel's ability to further collateralize its massive debt by expanding its holdings.

Has the fact that the FCC chairman is the son of the nation's most politically enfranchised former military official had any impact on the fanatically pro-war stance that Clear Channel has taken with its recent actions? Or is the Clear Channel executive leadership, closely connected to the president, simply providing him with the kind of support one expects from political allies?

Whatever the answer, with Michael Powell, George W. Bush and Clear Channel, the lines between political, military and corporate media power have become blurred into one authoritarian impulse. ■

Stephen Marshall is a Sundance-award winning documentary filmmaker and creative director of Guerilla News Network, www.gnn.tv.





Drop Television, Not Bombs

What the TV news can't tell you about the protests

By Will Nixon

The revolution will not be televised. My notebook made me a marked man. "Are you a journalist?" asked a young woman, peeking over my shoulder.

By then, the first half of the huge anti-war parade slowly proceeding down Broadway had disbanded into Washington Square Park, where hundreds of young marchers were holding a spontaneous protest carnival. There were people kneeling with chalk sticks to draw small peace symbols on every single one of the thousands of plaza tile stones. A woman was dancing with an Indian feather stick in a drumming circle, while a trumpeter in pink glasses played "God Bless America." There was a breakdancing team, a police helicopter hovering overhead, a flock of pigeons chased up into the trees. I was watching a circle of students dancing a jittery sort of pogo

bounce. They chanted with a rapid musical cadence that almost sounded gentle:

*One, two, three, four, we don't want your fucking war.
Five, six, seven, eight, stop the violence, stop the hate.*

People half my age were creating their own protest culture. I jotted it down in my notebook, one of dozens of observations about the rally.

"Are you a journalist?" she asked for the second time. "I've been pretty disappointed in journalists so far."

Actually, she sounded polite, even deferential. I got off easy. Minutes later, a young man cornered me by a police van parked at the corner of Washington Square and playing a message over its loudspeakers telling the incoming marchers to disperse to make room for the people still behind them. To me, the message



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made sense. The square couldn't hold 200,000 people. But this young man was incensed. "They're playing it every 75 seconds. They can't tell us the march is over," he said, pleading with me. He seemed to think that the reporter's notebook in my hand gave me the power to tell the van to shut up. He seemed to believe in some mystical power of the press.

Anger against the media was a palpable part of the anti-war march on March 22 in New York. "CNN Lies!" was the chant. "Weapons of Mass Distraction" read the handmade poster with a television drawn in the corner. "Why Protest Corporate Media?" was the headline of a flier that offered at least a dozen reasons. One marcher even wore the empty plastic box of a TV set over his shoulders so that his head appeared "on the air" nodding and smirking at us like a braindead anchorman.

To be honest, I was surprised by this anger. Perhaps I'm too cynical or naive, or both, but I wanted to ask: What do you expect? The problem isn't just corporate media. It's the medium of television.

Over the years, some astute critics of television have argued that the technology itself severely limits what the boob tube can tell us about the world: It favors individuals over groups, simple opinions over complex ideas, fast action over the true pace of life. And, unfortunately for progressives, many of the things we cherish play poorly on TV. For example, how well would they cover this march?

The first television news team I spotted was standing on a side street in the Thirties. The reporter was a striking young blonde in a camel-hair coat and khaki slacks holding a Channel 7 microphone down at her side, a tool for a job she wasn't eager to begin. I was reminded of an NPR book reviewer who once told me that radio is performing, television is modeling. And had I seen this reporter on the news, I might have resented her and her beauty. But in person, I experienced the opposite. I felt genuine empathy for her. I wondered if she resented having to work on Saturday when everyone else was having fun protesting. I wondered if she felt overdressed for this crowd. (Even the man carrying a "Corporate Lawyers Against War" placard had taken off his suitcoat and tie, if not his white shirt and dark slacks.) I wondered if she felt like someone forcing herself to crash a party that really wasn't her style. Fortunately, her cameraman seemed at ease with New York street crowds, so he led her out to find an interview.

To me, the splendor of this march was the amazing diversity of people, placards, costumes, everything down to the drums, which ranged from paint buckets to stove pots to office water cooler jugs. Everywhere I looked I saw colorful characters. A man in a black T-shirt with skeleton-ribs. A woman with tousled hair holding up a sign: "The Only Bush I Trust Is My Own." Three petite Japanese women in white helmets who smiled shyly to one another while carrying a banner: "Smash the Evils of Imperialist America."

Yet, from all this diversity, the reporter chose an avuncular white man with graying hair, heavy eyebrows and reading glasses that hung over the open collar of his casual dress shirt. No doubt he represented a "normal" American amid this crowd of exuberant radicals, bohemians and fashionable Manhattanites. But he also seemed a safe bet for her interview. He was friendly and

respectful. At the end, he wished her well with a big smile and touched her sleeve, almost as if he'd been talking with his own niece about her exciting new job as a television reporter. He'd been having a conversation with a person, not with a television camera. And, yet, I wondered what the television audience would see: 10 seconds of his animated, conflicted face as he answered her question about patriotism, which would be sandwiched between her own calm appearance on camera, introducing him and summing up. In the context of this raucous parade, he had looked pretty thoughtful to me, but on the television news he might just seem angry.

Farther down Broadway, I came to television command central in Herald Square. The police had barricaded off a full lane for the broadcast trucks with their telescope poles raised skyward and satellite dishes aimed downtown. Behind the metal barrier the crowd was squeezed like a wallpaper mob. On the television side, the reporter had plenty of room. He was a handsome young black man dressed in a dark blue shirt who focused on the camera tripod about 12 feet away. A second tripod cast extra light on his face, even on this sunny afternoon. And I was impressed by his concentration, his calm, his confidence. He didn't look like the rest of us with all of our anger, uncertainty and hope.


Then he turned to interview a mother pinned against the barrier with her son, who was perhaps 6 years old and apparently unaware he was on television. She, too, looked "normal" in her casual weekend clothes, although she wore an American flag scarf, and she, too, grew passionate when asked about patriotism. After she finished, the reporter turned back to the camera and wrapped up his story with the same stoic face. Not until he was off the air did he seem to reveal his true mood by responding to one of the guys on the set with a jockish smile.

What would television tell someone about this rally? Almost nothing I considered worth remembering. Not the infectious spirit of defiance, the ribald humor of the placards, or the sense of kinship with thousands of strangers. Not the warmth of the sun after such a harsh winter or the yellowness of the daffodils in several marchers' hands. Not the feeling of hope, at least for an afternoon, that we could reclaim our country from the Bush administration.

And certainly not what I found moments later performing 30 feet from the television trucks in the triangle park of Herald Square. A street theater group of women were dressed up like campy clowns with silver, blue and orange wigs, with Victoria Secret-style bras and panties pulled over their blue tights. For the finishing touch, they each wore a two-foot-long silver rocket strapped on like a dildo. They performed a choreographed routine and sang with the perkiness of cheerleaders:

*Shop in the name of war
You need a whole lot more
Don't think it over
Don't think it over*

Then they continued on their way downtown with their phallic missiles wagging in the sunshine. The day we see that on television is the day we will see honest coverage of the war. ■



*Much more
is at stake in
this war
than the
future of
Saddam
Hussein*

Today, Iraq. Tomorrow ... Democracy?

By Slavoj Žižek

The one good argument for this war is evoked by Christopher Hitchens: The majority of Iraqis are Saddam's victims, and they would be really glad to be rid of him. He is such a catastrophe for his country that American occupation, in whatever form, is a much brighter prospect for Iraqi citizens. We are not talking here of "bringing Western democracy to Iraq," but of just getting rid of the nightmare called Saddam. To this majority, the caution expressed by Western liberals cannot but appear deeply hypocritical. Do they really care about how the Iraqi people feel?

In the same vein, I remember dozens of Western leftists in the early '90s who proudly crowed that "Yugoslavia still exists" and reproached me for betraying the unique chance of maintaining Milosevic's Yugoslavia—to which I always answered that I am not yet ready to lead my life so that it will not disappoint Western leftist dreams. Few attitudes are more crassly ideologi-

cal than a tenured Western academic arrogantly dismissing (or, even worse, "understanding") an Eastern European from an ex-communist country who longs for Western liberal democracy and some consumer goods.

However, as the troops' decidedly mixed reception demonstrates, it is all too easy to slip from this recognition to the notion that "under their skin, Iraqis are just like us, and really want the same as we do." All we need to do is just give people a chance, liberate them from their imposed constraints, and they will join us in our ideological dream. No wonder an American official used the term "capitalist revolution" to describe what Americans are now doing: exporting their revolution all around the world. They have moved from "containing" the enemy to a more aggressive stance. Like the defunct Soviet Union decades ago, the United States is now the country subversively fomenting world revolution. Bush recently declared: "The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world, it is God's gift to humanity." Indeed,



and the United States just happens to be the chosen instrument for distributing this gift.

Abstract pacifism is intellectually stupid and morally wrong—one has to stand up against a threat. Of course the fall of Saddam would be a relief to a large majority of Iraqi people, and a whiff of liberal hypocrisy does taint many of the stated reasons against war. But the war is still wrong—because *who is leading it* makes it wrong. This is not a question of war or peace in the short term, but of the “gut feeling” that something is terribly wrong with this war, that something is irretrievably changing with it.

One of Jacques Lacan’s more outrageous statements is that, even if what a jealous husband claims about his unfaithful wife is all true, his jealousy is still pathological. The same should be said today about the claim that “Saddam has weapons of mass destruction!” Even if this claim is true (and it probably is, at least to some degree), it is still false with regard to the position from which it is enunciated. Everyone knows that this war is about more than weapons of mass destruction. But it is about more than oil, too. As ardent hawks William Kristol and Lawrence F. Kaplan write in their recent *The War Over Iraq*, the war “is about more even than the future of the Middle East and the war on terror. It is about what sort of role the United States intends to play in the twenty-first century.”

One cannot but agree: The future of the international community is at stake now—the new rules that will regulate it, what the new world order will be. We are in the midst of a “silent revolution,” in which the unwritten rules that determine the most elementary international logic are changing. Washington scolded German Prime Minister Gerhard Schröder, a democratically elected leader, for maintaining an anti-war stance supported by the large majority of Germans. In Turkey, according to opinion polls, 94 percent of the people were opposed to allowing U.S. troops in their country for the war. Where is democracy here? Those who pose as global defenders of democracy are the ones who are effectively undermining it.

It is crucial to remember that the present regime in Iraq is ultimately a secular nationalist one, out of touch with Muslim fundamentalist populism. Obviously, Saddam only superficially flirts with pan-Arab Muslim sentiment. As his past clearly demonstrates, he is a pragmatic ruler striving for power, who shifts alliances when it fits his purposes—first against Iran to grab their oil fields, then against Kuwait for the same reason, bringing against himself a pan-Arab coalition allied with the United States. Saddam is *not* a fundamentalist obsessed with the “Great Satan,” ready to blow the world apart just to get him. What can

emerge as a result of U.S. occupation and low-intensity (but bloody) “clean-up” operations, however, is a truly fundamentalist Muslim, anti-American movement, directly linked to such movements in other Muslim countries.

Direct American occupation of a large and key Arab country—how will this not generate a reaction of universal hatred? One can imagine thousands of young people dreaming of becoming suicide bombers—indeed, volunteers are already streaming into Iraqi embassies—and how that will force the U.S. government to impose a permanent high-alert emergency state. At this point, one cannot resist a slightly paranoid temptation: What if the people around Bush know this, what if this “collateral damage” is the true aim of the entire operation? What

if the true target of the “war on terror” is American society itself—the disciplining of its emancipatory excesses?

*What if the true
target of the ‘war on
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On March 5, MSNBC’s *Buchanan & Press* show displayed a photo of the recently captured Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the “third man of al-Qaeda”—a mean visage, in an unspecified nightgown prison-dress, half-opened and with something like bruises half-discernible, hints that he was already tortured. Pat Buchanan’s fast voice was asking: “Should this man who knows all the names, all the detailed plans for the future terrorist attacks on the United States, be tortured, so that we get all this out of him?” The horror was that the photo already suggested the answer. No wonder the response of other commentators and viewers’ calls was an overwhelming “Yes!”

This is a pretty close realization of what Orwell imagined in 1984’s “hate sessions,” where the citizens are shown photos of the traitors and supposed to boo and yell at them. And the story goes on: A day later, a Fox News commentator claimed that we are allowed to do with this prisoner whatever we want—deprive him of sleep, break his fingers, etc.—because he is “a piece of human garbage with no rights whatsoever.” That such public statements are possible today is the true catastrophe.

We should therefore be very attentive not to fight ancillary battles: the debates on how bad Saddam is, or on how much the war costs, even on how well (or poorly) the invasion and occupation is proceeding. The focus should be on what effectively goes on in our culture, on what kind of society is emerging here as the result of the “war on terror.” The ultimate result of this war will be a change in our political order. ■

Slavoj Žižek, a philosopher and psychoanalyst, is a senior researcher at the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities, in Essen, Germany. Among other books, he is the author of *The Fragile Absolute* and *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*

To See or Not To See

By Joe Knowles

The images we saw on TV last night ... were terrible. The whole city looked as if it were on fire. ... The only thing I could think of was 'why does this have to happen to Baghdad.' "

In this instantly uplinked war, thoughts such as these are not unusual, whether your television network of choice is CNN

Regarding the Pain of Others

By Susan Sontag

Farrar, Straus and Giroux
131 pages, \$20

or Al Jazeera. But this quote is of a different kind, coming as it does not from a spectator but from the epicenter of the war itself—from one "Salam Pax," purportedly a 29-year-old, Britpop-loving gay architect from Baghdad, who, disquietingly, was last heard from on March 24.

Salam Pax's vivid Web log, (http://dear_raed.blogspot.com/), in which he enlightens his readership on the specifics of duct-taping windows and making educated guesses about the timing of bombing runs, may be the most telling social document yet of the Second Gulf War, and not just for its novel use of a novel medium. For even as the Baghdad blogger ventures outside to survey the state of his besieged city, he is sometimes forced to rely, just like the rest of us, on what he can glean from television. It's a media war, even within Iraq.

The crucial difference, of course, is that we are free to switch the channel to a *Seinfeld* rerun, or to flip the set off altogether. Americans seem to forget that they are able to compartmentalize this war in a way not possible when the bombs are falling next door. This is why, when the limits of human empathy seem as appallingly finite as the schedule of *TV Guide*, a few well-chosen words of reflection can be worth more than a thousand pictures. Photographs can shock, as Susan Sontag writes, but "narratives can make us understand."

Sontag's latest book-length essay, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, is not an attempt to understand any war in particular, least of all this one. Nor is it an

attempt to grapple with war in general. It undertakes something that, depending on how you look at it, is either far more ambitious or not ambitious at all: to describe the distance between the experience of extreme violence and its representation. It asks how people can be moved by each other's misery when all they have to go on is a photograph.

Except, as Sontag would say, in war we always have a lot more to go on than just a photograph. "All photographs wait to be

explained or falsified by their captions," she writes. The meanings, for example, of pictures presently circulating—to the great displeasure of the Pentagon—of dead American soldiers and POWs can be wildly multiplicitous, depending on how they are put in context. For the Iraqi government's propagandists, they are proof positive that the American invaders are doomed, that Saddam is invincible. For Donald Rumsfeld, they are a belated reason to suddenly care about international law. For *In These Times*, they are reminders that real people are dying in this war, including Americans.

Sontag's essay, ever cognizant of the competing claims made on photography, especially war photography, is a caption to end all captions, an attempt to untangle the knot of meanings attached to images of death and destruction, from *The Iliad* to TV coverage of the Siege of Sarajevo—and then leave those disparate strands dangling. Sontag is an expert parser of meanings, and her project amounts to a brisk, absorbing yet informal history of war photography, situated in an appropriate philosophical and aesthetic context, qualified with sensible caveats and ultimately coming to no real conclusions. This is not necessarily indecisive, for sometimes description is all we can muster to comprehend horror.

And along the way on this tricky terrain, Sontag manages to hit upon valuable insights. For starters, when contemplating contemporary information-age glut, she points out that numbed response to this sort of overload is nothing new. In 1800, William Wordsworth was already railing against "the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupation produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies." Wordsworth was complaining about modernity, not the media; the difference in how information is purveyed today is by degrees. And so Sontag is skeptical of the indictment—practically a cliché—that excessively violent images, by their sheer accumulation, can "desensitize" us to real suffering.

As ever, that depends on context. Spectacles of violence can be quite ennobling. "Representations of the Crucifixion do not become banal to



American and British casualties of war, as shown on Iraqi television. "All photographs wait to be explained or falsified by their captions," Susan Sontag writes.

believers, if they really are believers," Sontag notes of Christianity. Shi'a Muslims never tire of graphically memorializing the betrayal and murder of Imam Hussein at Kerbala, Iraq, and even Buddhism is first and foremost a philosophy of suffering and how to transcend it. On a more secular level, photographs of the liberated Nazi concentration camps continue to inspire the civilized world to "never forget," and have in fact, with the trials at Nuremberg and the 1949 Geneva Conventions, helped delegitimize genocide as an acceptable policy aim of nations. Where genocide has happened since, as underfunded human rights organizations never fail to remind us, it

Graphically violent images do not necessarily desensitize or sensationalize—they can be ennobling, too.

has been a consequence of too little publicity, not too much.

Sontag describes the unbearable effect of portrait after portrait of Khmer Rouge victims, thousands of whom were methodically photographed shortly before their execution: "These Cambodian women and men of all ages, including many children ... are ... forever looking at death, forever about to be murdered, forever about to be wronged. And the viewer is in the same position as the lackey behind the camera; the experience is sickening." In this instance, the very abundance of these photographs, and the harrowing sameness of them all, makes them so shocking.

Sontag shows how the liberal rhetoric of "desensitizing violence" underestimates the amazing human capacity to feel other people's sorrow; striking a note of urgency, she also shows how apathy actually does come about: not through quantity of images but through *passivity*, a feeling of helplessness that nothing can be done anyway, that all this mayhem is inevitable, that these people are crazy and it's none of my concern. This was exactly the attitude of one of Sontag's friends in Sarajevo about the war in Croatia—until it was her city's turn to be shelled. "Compassion is an unstable emotion,"

Sontag warns. "It needs to be translated into action, or it withers."

With that warning in mind, then, we should take a step back from this book. One is prompted to recall that in May 2001, Sontag was awarded the prestigious Jerusalem Prize. A coalition of nine major Israeli and Palestinian women's peace groups had begged Sontag not to come to Jerusalem to accept the award—had begged her not to effectively ignore the second *intifada* and lend an air of literary legitimacy to the Israeli government's ongoing dispossession of the Palestinians. There was a precedent: A few years previously, another famous Jewish writer, South Africa's Nadine Gordimer, had declined the Jerusalem Prize, observing that she had no desire to travel from one apartheid country to another.

Some of Sontag's old friends in Bosnia, where she had so publicly (some would say ostentatiously) directed *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo during the siege, were also mystified that she would go to Israel to be praised by Shimon Peres, one of the three judges for the prize, whose Labour government had shamelessly routed arms to Serbia. As one Sarajevo weekly asked, "Which citizens, residents, non-residents or refugees of Jerusalem will consider her visit an act of solidarity or a betrayal of principles?"

It was a good question, and this was Sontag's indirect reply from the podium:

And of course I have opinions, political opinions, some of them formed from reading and discussing and reflecting, but not from firsthand experience. ... I believe that the doctrine of collective responsibility, as a rationale for collective punishment, is never justified, militarily or ethically. I mean the use of disproportionate firepower against civilians, the demolition of their homes and destruction of their orchards and groves, the deprivation of their livelihood and their access to employment, schooling, medical services, free access to neighboring towns and communities. ... I also believe that there can be no peace here until the planting of Israeli communities in the Territories is halted, followed by the eventual dismantling of these settlements.

Few individuals other than Sontag could scarcely have put it better. And few individuals other than Sontag could

scarcely have come up with this astonishing sleight-of-hand:

But do I hold these predictable opinions as a writer? ... The influence a writer can exert is purely adventitious. It is, now, an aspect of the culture of celebrity. There is something vulgar about public dissemination of opinions on matters about which one does not have extensive firsthand knowledge. ... Serious writers, creators of literature ... should be in opposition to the communal drone of the newscast and the talk show. ... The wisdom of literature is quite antithetical to having opinions.

Never mind the hypocrisy of excoriating the "culture of celebrity" while basking in the glow of a major award ceremony; this statement insultingly privileges "serious literature" over courageous journalism from Israel and Palestine, indeed from all battlezones where one cannot be privy to "extensive firsthand knowledge." Must we all have directed plays in besieged Sarajevo to understand the brutality of Milosevic and Karadzic? Do we all have to face down bulldozers in the Gaza Strip to grasp—and act against—the injustice, enshrined in the Fourth Geneva Convention, of forced population transfer and illegal settlement? (The "facts on the ground" are not in the least controversial in this instance, though for some reason they become so when actually mentioned in public. Since when are "predictable opinions" such as Sontag's part of the "communal drone of the newscast and the talkshow"?)

Perhaps her reticence to have "opinions," to actually speak up for a principle she believes in when more than just a gang of Serb nationalists might be offended, is understandable given Sontag's previous embrace, long ago, of variously questionable entities (such as the North Vietnamese Communist Party). In any event, her mealy-mouthed behavior in Jerusalem does explain the rather odd concluding passage of *Regarding the Pain of Others*, which is that, ultimately, those of us who have not "put in time under fire" can never really know what war is like.

Well, obviously. But so what? How is that relevant to the task of communicating—across time, place, language, ethnicity—the urgency of human dignity in the face of aggression? Communication has always required a medium, whether photography, journalism, or the human

voice itself, and we have always had the burden of using our intelligence to judge the veracity of that communication. We have always had to risk an informed conclusion. For Sontag to effectively shrug and walk away from this imperfect arrange-

ment in a haze of literary highmindedness betrays a sad contentment with a dangerously withered compassion. ■

Joe Knowles is culture editor of *In These Times*.

The Price Isn't Right

By Sandy Zipp

I believe we are at the threshold of a fundamental change in our popular economic thought," Franklin Roosevelt announced during his 1932 campaign for the presidency. "In the future," he predicted, "we are going to think less about the producer and more about the consumer."

Why, at the very lowest point of the Depression, when factories were stalled, thousands of workers idle, and families on the brink of starvation, would a campaigning politician turn his attention to the private,

or the boom years between the war and the oil crisis of the '70s—but a "complex shared commitment." This compact, or strategy—visible as such only in the historian's hindsight, but agreed to by Democratic and

offered to Americans. As such, it can be evaluated not solely by how successful it was in delivering its intended benefits, but by how pervasively it came to provide the terms in which people—even those left out of its munificence—understood themselves as private individuals and public citizens.

Cohen demonstrates how thoroughly acquisitive ideals usually judged to be private, or self-indulgent, questions of individual material desire became matters of public, political import. This differs from some recent accounts of consumption in at least one crucial way. Historian Gary Cross writes, for instance, that "consumerism—the understanding of self in society through goods—has provided, on balance, a more dynamic and popular, while less destructive, ideology of public life than most political systems in the twentieth century."

Consumerism "won," in his words, because it "concretely expressed" liberty and democracy by redefining them. Liberty became more than the abstract right promised by citizenship; it became the right to express oneself and realize personal pleasure through goods. Democracy no longer meant only equal rights or access to the political process, but the ability to share "with others in personal ownership and use of commodities." According to Cross, it created social solidarities and opportunities for participation in national life that were felt to transcend even suffrage rights or political ideologies. The "world of goods" replaced the "republic of producers."

But Cohen's consumers' republic does not represent the decline of politics. Instead, it became the language through which public and political issues were understood and contested. Cohen is most adept at showing how this consumer's republic was instituted and perpetuated by specific policies and interests and in particular landscapes.

As a purely economic fact, historians have determined that by the early 20th century, consumer demand had become the prime engine of American corporate capitalism. But that fact only gradually registered with observers at the time, and while Progressive-era consumers backed

A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America

By Lizabeth Cohen
Alfred A. Knopf
567 pages, \$35

individualistic sphere of the marketplace, and away from wages and production, the traditional engines of the American industrial economy?

Answering that question, as Lizabeth Cohen demonstrates in her fine new history *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, requires understanding fundamental, pervasive and long-lasting shifts in the United States' political economy and political culture. These transformations, while underway in the '30s, would have their most pervasive effects in the 30 years after World War II, when Americans at all levels embraced the idea that their roles as public citizens were tangibly joined to their roles in the private marketplace as consumers.

The "consumer's republic" is Cohen's name not only for a time period—previously known as the high tide of national and urban liberalism, the age of the suburbs,

Republican policymakers, business and labor leaders, and citizen activists—put the private mass consumption marketplace, supported by government resources and policy, at the center of postwar prosperity.

As a way of life, the consumer's republic promised Americans not only a prosperous society, but a more equitable, democratic one in which the availability and abundance of goods would support and perpetuate basic and long-standing ideals of American freedom and equality. In other words, the consumer's republic was one of the most encompassing utopian ideals yet



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Culture

the political and economic reforms that brought anti-trust legislation, regulation of commodities producers, municipal utilities and election reform, it was not until the New Deal that consumption assumed pride of place in both the nation's political economy and political culture.

As part of their campaign to shore up the corporate capitalism that the Depression imperiled, Roosevelt's advisers recognized and encouraged grassroots consumer activism as a legitimate form of civic participation, even as they identified underconsumption as a major cause of the economic doldrums, and before they embraced Keynesian economic measures to stimulate consumer demand. With the war, consumption was irretrievably politicized, as the Office of Price Administration's price controls set moral and monetary guidelines for consumer spending.

With the country needing every citizen to be what one wartime song called a "wise consumer," new avenues of public legitimacy opened for marginalized people, particularly women and African Americans. Cohen contends that despite the iconic Rosie the Riveter image, women "were hailed most consistently as the standard-bearers of homefront consumerist citizenship." They were expected to maintain what she calls "their own disciplined patriotic market behavior," and to be vigilant for such responsible moral standards in others. When paired with their increased opportunities in defense industries, the war years, although tumultuous and unsure, emerge in Cohen's telling as a high-water mark for women's active participation in the nation's public life.

African-Americans faced a different challenge, but a similar opportunity. With the sudden importance of consumer-citizenship, blacks' lack of equal access to restaurants, bars, public transportation, movie theaters, stores, pools and hotels became increasingly stark evidence of second-class citizenship. Such restrictions, Cohen points out, violated "both the assumed universality of citizenship and the supposed freedom of the free market," but also opened up "new ground" upon which blacks could "stake their claim to fuller political participation."

Blacks were "jim-crowed" all over the country—not just in the South—and discrimination in employment and housing, as well as unequal access to OPA price and

rent protections, deepened the impact of segregation in public accommodations. But all across the country, blacks demanded equal access to public accommodations through sit-ins and demonstrations. These early skirmishes, the first of the modern Civil Rights Movement, demonstrated that lack of access to the full fruits of mass consumption was evidence of inferior political status.

With the end of hostilities, and postwar reconversion of industry imminent, business and industrial interests launched a concerted, and largely successful, campaign to kill price and rent controls. As a result, the consumer movement of the war years lost influence, and the loyal, sacrificing "consumer citizen" was gradually eclipsed by the new individualized "purchaser as citizen." This ideal underwrote

**Consumerism has
provided the terms by
which people—even
those denied its
wealth—understand
themselves as citizens.**

the full emergence of the consumers' republic, as American interests of all political stripes promoted consumer spending as the one true road to equality and prosperity for all Americans. Individuals pursuing their many desires—houses, cars and consumer durables all bought on credit—juiced the economy, and the United States enjoyed several decades of prosperity.

But that prosperity was hardly shared equally, and the bulk of Cohen's book is dedicated to revealing the various ways in which the mass consumer market "advantaged some social groups over others and created new inequalities while addressing old ones." From a GI Bill that ignored women, slighted blacks, and gave middle-class men more opportunities than those offered to workers, to a new income tax code that favored married couples in which women did not work and rewarded homeowners and male breadwinners, the policy infrastructure of this republic underwrote division, not equality. Politicized black consumers did carry out, and eventually

Kiss the Girls, Make Them Cry

By Joshua Rothkopf

You don't have to be an embedded journalist to know we're missing much of the good stuff on live television. I'm referring of course to the passionate liplock between Lena Katina and

200 Km/h in the Wrong Lane

t.A.T.u.

Interscope Records

Lilya 4-ever

Written and directed by Lukas Moodysson

Julia Volkova, two Russian teens better known to the pop world as million-sellers t.A.T.u., whose dalliance on *The Tonight Show* was met with frantic camera swiveling and a cutaway to a rather boring guitar player. (He still might have been preferable to what England's *Top of the Pops* subbed in: a straight couple snogging in the audience.)

The Kiss is definitely part of the act; it may be the whole act itself. As much a pre-fabrication as The Monkees or Menudo, t.A.T.u. (which stands for "this girl loves that girl" in Russian slang) were hand-picked from hundreds of schoolgirls by one savvy entrepreneur, Ivan Shapovalov, clearly up on his Nabokov as much as his Jerry Springer. Even their recorded songs, huge hits around the world, feature suspiciously extended synth solos that would make former members of Yes jealous, leaving plenty of room for who-knows-what.

Take your pick: pornification of the mainstream, exploitation of minors (the girls only recently turned 18), flagrant abuse of plaid miniskirts—t.A.T.u. have already served their purpose. Not by donning "Fuck War" T-shirts, a message which probably registered to most Americans unfamiliar with Cyrillic as a creative misspelling of "xylophone," but by revealing how deathly afraid broadcasters are of Queer Planet, even one as stubble-free and (as the

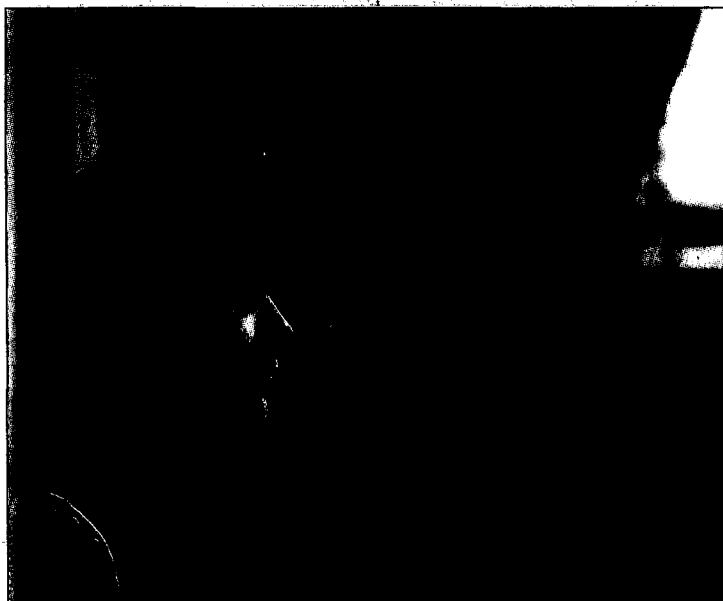
rumor goes) phony as t.A.T.u.'s femme-on-femme variety is. Only weeks later, one could watch Oscar-winner Adrien Brody soul-kissing Halle Berry—a gesture as inflammatory to certain red-staters as Michael Moore's tirade—while t.A.T.u. found themselves stalled on the charts, their sales pitch censored.

Coming as a footnote to all this, maybe unfairly, is the music: darkly dramatic and pretty much irresistible. To my ears, all teen pop has an air of well-scrubbed desperation about it, from the Jackson Five down to Britney Spears. In the case of t.A.T.u., always fleeing lyrically from a harsh world that doesn't approve ("Nothing can stop this/not now I love you/They're not going to get us!"), the fear and flight actually make sense. Their producer, Trevor Horn, is the sonic genius behind Frankie Goes to Hollywood's thundering "Relax," and he brings the same doomy sex thump to these grooves, a lesbian response come 20 years later. (They also do a high-pitched cover of the

What does any of this have to do with Lukas Moodysson's fierce call-to-conscience *Lilya 4-ever*, only his third feature into what already seems a politically committed career? Quite a lot; his main character, Lilya (the angel-faced Oksana Akinshina), is one of those Russian teens not yet on the pop charts but prone to mentioning she was born on the same day (if not year) of Princess Britney herself. (Lena and Julia also gaze out from a poster pinned to her bedroom wall; later, their wails are heard on a car radio, the soundtrack to a sleet-filled skyline of hopeless tenement rows.) Lilya dreams of America, of an escape to anywhere. Her despair is what ultimately most resembles t.A.T.u.; in a way it redeems their manufactured defiance. Moodysson's film is about what happens when that dream of escape goes horribly wrong.

Lukas Moodysson, a Swede, has crystallized into the world's preeminent director of youth in crisis. His debut feature, *Show Me Love* (the inspiration for t.A.T.u.'s best song, similarly titled), is about the sexual attraction between two teen-aged girls caught in the flush of adolescent rage. *Together* was an oasis of humanity released in September 2001; its gentle '70s hippie community besieged by its own ideals might have offered shell-shocked viewers more comfort than they could immediately feel. Both are sweet, honest films—well worth seeking out if only to recognize the unsparing imagist Moodysson has become: Lilya, physically beaten and glassy-eyed, standing on a bridge overlooking the buzzing freeway.

Oksana Akinshina in *Lilya 4-ever*.



Smiths' "How Soon Is Now?" which actually outdoes the original for sheer hormonal meltdown.) You wonder how many compromises Lena and Julia have had to make to escape into this fantasy, and you pray they're not pretending.

From these indelible first moments, underscored by a heavy metal crush courtesy the German band Rammstein, Moodysson pulls back to three months earlier and a grim picture of life in the decrepit suburbs of an unnamed post-Soviet city (filmed in Tallinn, Estonia). After gloating to

friends about her mother's American boyfriend and his plan to bring them to the States, Lilya is stunned to her knees to be left behind by the adults who don't want her along, their tires screeching. Moodysson slows down the action and drops the sound, resulting in a potent, almost iconic image of abandonment; parents are rarely any help in his teen-centric universe. Suffering the first of several blows to come, Lilya is forced by an aunt of surprising cruelty (it must run in the family) to move into a cheaper apartment—a disgusting pit of grime and soiled sheets only made vacant by the death of the former tenant.

As difficult as these early scenes are to watch, they do establish a strangely reassuring toughness in Lilya and her friends, who pursue the same stupid kicks that kids do around the world: sniffing the glue provided by a lonely younger boy, Volodya (Artiom Bogucharskij), and chasing each other around the crumbling pylons of abandoned Soviet military factories. These children of the revolution fail to recognize Brezhnev's name but envy the five-year plan of world dominator Michael Jordan and those wearing his swoosh, an irony that's perhaps a touch too bald but not unmerited.

More subtly effective are the recession-proof dance clubs, free to young women and hotbeds for transactional sex. Lilya is drawn against her will to this demeaning setting—first by a damaging association with a girlfriend, then by necessity—and Moodysson pulls off one of his signature zooms right up to Akinshina's face, frozen in a mask of resignation as she rides the train to her first night's work. It's a turning point, a grave mistake captured in quiet focus, and Moodysson's young actress doesn't flinch.

Nor does the script flinch from where it must go, though hope does arrive briefly with a handsome young clubgoer, Andrei (Pavel Ponomarev), sweeping Lilya off her feet on chaste dates involving giggly bumper-car rides and romantic meals at McDonald's. Volodya, the boy, is suspicious of him, but a flight to Sweden is somehow booked; once again, tires screech off leaving someone behind. You could reasonably think for a second Lilya has finally made it, carefully unwrapping her airline tray with palpable excitement. The third act begins with a door locking behind her.

Can a film so expressly dedicated to the young girls sold into the sex trade be fairly dismissed as miserablism? Only by those unaware of the real problems in their own first-world cities and neighborhoods; Moodysson was inspired by an appalling event he'd heard of in his hometown of Malmö, where the story concludes. He sets up dark echoes: another dingy apartment to tidy up (perhaps also vacated by the dead); a devastating shot of Lilya tearing into McDonald's in the

backseat of her brutal pimp's car, his reward to her for services rendered, the dates with Andrei fading away.

Volodya visits Lilya in her fantasies, like an angel in the framed picture she unpacks from place to place. But God is absent from *Lilya 4-ever*, ending with an epiphany as expressive as any in Moodysson's work but never this damning. The finality is an overwhelming call to action on behalf of others; I really hope t.A.T.u. can make it down to the theaters. ■

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In Memoriam Julius Jacobson (1922-2003)

The editorial board of *New Politics* mourns the March 8 passing of Julius Jacobson, the magazine's founding and longtime editor. He will be missed by all supporters of the democratic socialist left.

A memorial meeting will be held on Sunday, April 27, 12:00 noon at the Cantor Film Center Auditorium, 36 East 8th Street, New York, NY. Memorial donations in Julius Jacobson's name may be made to *New Politics*, PO Box 98, Brooklyn, NY 11231.

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Dear Mr. Vonnegut,

The other day I was asked to do the now common act of taking off my shoes at the airport security screening.

As I deposited my shoes in the tray, a sense of utter absurdity washed over me. I have to take my shoes off and have them scanned by an X-ray machine because some guy tried to blow up an airliner with his sneakers. And I thought, I feel like I'm in a world not even Kurt Vonnegut could have imagined. So now that I find I can ask you such questions, tell me, could you have imagined it? (We're in real trouble if someone figures out how to make explosive pants.)

Patrick Mazza
Seattle

Dear Patrick,

The shoe thing at the airports and Code Orange and so on are world-class practical jokes, all right. But my all-time favorite is one the holy, anti-war clown Abbie Hoffman (1936-1989) pulled off during the Vietnam War. He announced that the new high was banana peels taken rectally. So then FBI scientists stuffed banana peels up their asses to find out if this was true or not. Or so we hoped.

Kurt

My first question is: Do you think Bush has lost his mind, or has he always been this insanely evil? My second question is: Do you expect the war on Iraq will turn out to be as catastrophic as Vietnam?

Kevin Hatton
Lake Orion, Michigan

Dear Kevin,
I sure hope not.

Kurt

I have not so much a comment or a question for you, but rather a request: Please tell me it will all be OK.

Joe Cararie
Pittsburgh

Dear Joe,

Welcome to Earth, young man. It's hot in the summer and cold in the winter. It's

round and wet and crowded. At the outside, Joe, you've got about a hundred years here. There's only one rule that I know of: Goddamn it, Joe, you've got to be kind!

Kurt

If you knew that a man posed a danger to you—maybe he had a gun in his pocket, and you felt that he would not hesitate one moment to use it on you—what would you do?

We know Iraq poses a threat to us, to the rest of the world. Why do we sit here and pretend we are protected? That is exactly what happened with al-Qaeda and 9/11. With Iraq, though, the threat is on a much larger scale. Should we sit back, be little children that sit in fear and just wait?

Charles Perkins
Address withheld

Dear Charles,

Please, for the sake of all of us, get a shotgun, preferably a 12-gauge double-barrel, and right there in your own neighborhood blow off the heads of people, cops excepted, who may be armed.

Kurt

How can the American public be so stupid? People still believe that Bush was elected, that he cares about us and has some idea of what he is doing. How can we "save" people by killing them and destroying their country? How can we strike first on the belief that we will soon be attacked? No sense, no reason, no moral grounds have gotten through to him. He is nothing but a moron puppet leading us all over the precipice. Why can't people see



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that the military dictator in the White House has no clothes?

Devon Warner
San Francisco

Dear Devon,

Mark Twain (1835-1910) in 1898, long before the First World War (1914-1918), wrote "The Mysterious Stranger." In that tale he proves to his own grim satisfaction, and to mine as well, that Satan and not God created the planet Earth and "the damned human race."

If you still doubt that we are demons in Hell, Devon, which I guess you don't, please read "The Mysterious Stranger" or your morning paper. Never mind what paper. Never mind what date.

Kurt

Got a question for Mr. Vonnegut? Write to vonnegut@inthesetimes.com.

The Looking Glass War

By Peter Freundlich

All right. Let me see if I understand the logic of this correctly. We ignored the United Nations in order to teach Saddam Hussein that the United Nations cannot be ignored. We've waged war to preserve the United Nations' ability to avert war. The paramount principle has been that the United Nations' word must be taken seriously, and if we've had to subvert its word to guarantee that it is, then, by gum, so be it. Peace is too important not to take up arms to defend. Am I getting this right?

Further, if the only way to bring democracy to Iraq was to vitiate the democracy of the Security Council, then we were honor-bound to do that too because democracy as we define it is too important to be stopped by a little thing like democracy as they define it.

Also, in dealing with a man who brooks no dissension at home, we cannot afford dissension here: We must speak with one voice against Saddam Hussein's failure to allow opposing voices to be heard. We have sent our gathered might to the Persian Gulf to make the point that might does not make right, as Saddam Hussein seems to think it does, and we twisted the arms of the opposition in order to force it to agree to let us oust a regime that twists the arms of the opposition. We cannot leave in power a dictator who ignores his own people, and if our people, and people elsewhere in the world, fail to understand that, then we have no choice but to ignore them.

Listen, don't misunderstand. I think it is a good thing that the members of the Bush Administration seem to have been reading Lewis Carroll. I only wish someone had pointed out that *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* are meditations on paradox and puzzle and illogic and on the strangeness of things, not templates for foreign policy. It is amusing for the Mad Hatter to

say something like "We must make war on him because he is a threat to peace," but not amusing for someone who actually commands an army to say that.

As a collector of laughable arguments, I'd be enjoying all this were it not for the fact that I know—we all know—that lives will continue to be lost in what amounts to a freak circular-reasoning accident. ■

